NBO
Pollard

THE

BURDEN LIFTED.

BY

JOSEPHINE POLLARD.

TWO ILLUSTRATIONS.

NEW YORK: HUNT & EATON.
CINCINNATI: CRANSTON & STOWE.

CONTENTS:

Illustrations.

THE BURDEN LIFTED.

CHAPTER I.

COMING HOME.

IT was very sudden, and there had been no opportunity of sending for Rena until all hope was over; and then the knowledge that she was left motherless failed to make any very deep impression. She had never been much with her mother, and remembered her only as a very timid woman, and all she knew of her father was that he was overbearing and tyrannical. All her attachments were at the school where she had spent the best years of her life, and the parting with her school-mates was a greater grief than the loss of a mother.

Notes of sympathy and affection were showered upon her after the fashion of school-girls, and the reading of them beguiled the journey

homeward. Home! She felt as if some terrible edict had suddenly and unexpectedly banished her into an exile as forlorn as if "Brittony"—as her father's estate was called—was in the very center of Siberia, instead of on the outskirts of a very respectable village. And, besides, there was Aunt Joanna, whom she could hardly be supposed to know very intimately, and yet disliked exceedingly.

The wonderful look on Rena Britton's face was well adapted to the occasion of her homecoming, and was deepened by her aunt's cold kiss and lean embrace, and her father's even more frigid courtesies.

Perhaps her mother would have greeted her more cordially, although Rena had no recollection of having been petted or caressed by those arms now folded so quietly upon the breast; and, looking down upon the still, cold face, she seemed to be conscious of a living presence, a divine motherhood, which the poor girl had dreamed of but never known. The tears she shed, however, were less for the mother she had lost than for the desert she had found; for if her father and Aunt Joanna

had been human islands they could not have led more isolated lives.

The funeral over, the house was restored to its usual condition, the brief excitement making the after-calm more gloomy and terrible.

Mr. Britton was absorbed in business; Joanna found the household duties most consuming, and there was nothing for Rena to do but to become more wholly devoted to herself and her own amusements. It was not a difficult task at first, for she had quantities of photographs, which she spent a whole day in disposing around her room, in order to get rid of the barrenness and bareness that oppressed her.

She was in the midst of this sociable operation, when Joanna burst into the room as if to announce the approach of an earthquake.

"Rena Britton!" she exclaimed, "what are you doing?"

"Receiving my friends," said Rena carelessly, and not interrupting her agreeable work.

"What will your father say?" continued the agitated Joanna; "he has strictly forbidden having a nail driven into these walls."

"I'm not driving any nails," said Rena calmly, not noticing her aunt's distress. "If these pictures would stay up in any other way, I'm sure I'd be very glad."

"There is sufficient room on the bureau or mantel for all the pictures you need," said her aunt, "and your father objects to having the walls defaced."

"When he sees how much more cozy and comfortable the room looks, I'm sure he'll want to engage me to decorate all the walls in the house in the same fashion."

"If you know when you're well off, Rena Britton, you'll do nothing to displease your father. It's a pity he didn't leave you at boarding-school, I think;" and with these words she closed the door, and left Rena to her meditations.

"Pity he didn't leave me at boarding-school?" she said, repeating her aunt's words. "It's a burning sin, and a downright shame! What does he want of me here any way, I'd like to know? I feel as if I was in a tomb!" And the sight of the sweet compassionate faces of her school-girl friends only served to make

this idea more prominent. They were but shadow-phantoms that pursued her; and yet she was grateful to them for the manna they provided.

No visitors came to "Brittony;" the tall trees shut off the prospect that might have been obtained from the windows; in the day-time the sun was excluded, and in the evening the house was pervaded by a dim, religious light, to which total darkness was preferable. It seemed to Rena as if her world was hung in crape. Every delicacy was provided for the table, for the Brittons had the reputation of living on the fat of the land, and Rena was liberally supplied with money she had no use for. Her mourning prevented any display of dress, and all her cravings for pictures and works of art were repressed by Aunt Joanna's declaration that her father was opposed to any such nonsense, and would much rather have her cultivate the useful instead of the purely ornamental.

"How can I?" said Rena, thinking the matter over, as she leaned idly on the window-sill. "There isn't any chance to be useful, as

I see. Aunt Joanna monopolizes that department, and I am really obliged to be ornamental and sentimental," she added with a half smile. "I declare! I haven't dusted my dissolving views, or uncovered my statuettes in ever so many days!" and in great haste Rena Britton seized the feather-duster, and moved about her room as industriously as if she really were in an art gallery.

"This is one of Richard's admirable little *sea*-scapes—I don't know what else to call it," said the young girl, pausing before the blank wall with eyes that saw not the immediate prospect. "I always wanted one, and told the girls it would be among my earliest possessions when I set up for myself. The tide is coming in; I hear it plash, plash, plash, upon the beach, and can hardly resist dipping my hands into the smooth white foam. Well, it's convenient, to say the least," she remarked, turning her attention to some other phantom; "for when I get tired of this I can very readily find another to supply its place, without the aid of a step-ladder. How very delightful!"

Her mocking tone betrayed the quality of

her enjoyment; and yet for want of something better to do she continued her fanciful occupation, dusting and disposing of imaginary vases and statuettes, arranging and re-arranging *souvenirs* of travels yet to be taken, and turning over with disgust the few books she had brought with her from school.

Sad reminders, these last, of days that were never to come again, and were all the brighter and more joyous by reason of the dullness by which she was surrounded.

Mr. Britton was closeted in his own room, when Joanna knocked timidly for admittance. No man enjoyed solitude better than he, and it was seldom, very seldom, he was intruded upon in this way. Joanna was careful not to disturb him, for she had some knowledge of John Britton's temper, and wouldn't for the world have meddled with nitro-glycerine.

"Joanna!" exclaimed Mr. Britton, as the door moved apologetically upon its hinges, and Joanna recoiled for a moment, and would instantly have retired, had not the necessity for action inspired her with courage.

"John, I must speak. It is absolutely nec-

essary. I am really afraid that Rena is losing her wits."

"Losing her wits!" ejaculated Mr. Britton, looking up from his book with some show of interest. "Girls of her age never have much to lose. Don't be silly, Joanna, and don't bother me with trifles."

"You wouldn't think it a trifle," said his sister, who was unusually persistent, "if you could hear the way she goes on, talking to herself by the hour together."

"Well, well," said Mr. Britton, "what of that? If you set yourself to watch every action of a whimsical girl you will keep yourself in business;" and Joanna knew very well it was useless to prolong the conversation.

But at dinner that day Rena was put through a course of catechism that convinced her father there was no immediate danger of softening of the brain, and made Rena doubt whether she had dined off roast lamb or dry roots. It was all done so solemnly, too, so unlike the spirited examinations to which she had been accustomed, that she felt very much as if she were undergoing a post-mortem examination,

and her replies were consequently cold and lifeless.

"I want you to begin a course of reading to-morrow," said her father, when they had withdrawn into the sitting-room. "You will find the books in the library arranged alphabetically; Joanna has the key."

Rena had seen the long array of unattractive volumes, with the white labels pasted uniformly on their backs, and had seriously made up her mind never to ask for the key or to manifest any curiosity in regard to them.

Little did she know of the thought and labor expended upon the collection; little did she realize her father's intentions in regard to her.

So day after day was passed in busy idleness, unbroken by the occurrence of any event that was likely to disturb the frigidity of the household, and Rena began to feel as if a residence at the north pole had had not a little influence upon her inclinations and desires. She was evidently growing torpid, and becoming absolutely indifferent to what was going on about her, when Aunt Joanna aroused her

from her apathetic condition, by handing her the key of the library, whose acquaintance she had not the least desire to cultivate.

Why should she feel obliged to do any thing so disagreeable? What possible advantage could there be in poring over musty books, that would not convey an atom of sense to her intelligence? It would be only a waste of time, if not utter foolishness, as she had not the least taste for such literature: so she boldly declined the offer of the key that would unlock such a sepulcher of dry bones.

"You wont?" said Joanna, amazed at her temerity, and actually forcing the key into her unwilling fingers. "You wont? The idea of the thing! When your father gives such positive orders! Rena Britton, he expects to be obeyed."

Rena was sullen.

"I am ashamed of you," continued her aunt; "really ashamed of your rebellious disposition. You didn't inherit that from your father's people, who are strong advocates of law and order," and the tall form was drawn up to even straighter proportions, as she promul-

gated the creed of a family whose name it was her pride to bear.

"You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink," was Rena's mental protest, as she mechanically twirled the key, which would not, she was very sure, admit her to any region of enchantment.

Joanna had done her duty. The key of the library was in Rena's possession, and it rested with her to disobey her father, and run the risk of his severe displeasure—and even his sister shrank from any exhibition of John Britton's temper—or to follow out his directions, and avoid any such conflict.

Rena respected the authority of her father, even while she rebelled against his mode of administration; while she had no sympathy with the love of order that would have a spasm over a speck of dust or a deviation from a straight line.

Assuming a look of indignant martyrdom, she waited until Aunt Joanna had withdrawn to the kitchen, and then inserted the key, as if it were the match to fire the brands that were to consume her. As if the volumes before her

were instruments of torture, she spitefully seized the one marked A, at the beginning of the line, and carefully locking the door of the library, as if there were danger of more escaping, she returned to her own room.

Of course, curiosity prompted her to look between the covers, to see for herself what was the plan of study arranged by her father, and to endeavor, if possible, to overcome any foolish prejudice that might have arisen.

She did nothing of the kind, but, without a glance at the title even, placed the offending and offensive volume beneath her mattress, and slept as calmly and peacefully above it as if it had no power to disturb her dreams. She actually forgot its existence, and was gradually becoming more reconciled to what she called her humdrum life, when an incident occurred that rather disturbed the serenity of her feelings.

CHAPTER II.

THE SKELETON IN THE HOUSE.

WHEN "Brittony" came into possession of its present owner it was quite a cheerful-looking mansion. Things were allowed to get out of order occasionally, and the home lights were permitted to shine through hospitable windows. Roses and vines had a way of clambering up those columns and over those walls that now stand out in chilly nakedness, and there was more of a human look to the house than there is at this day.

But that was thirty years ago, and thirty years will change people and places beyond recognition. It had, indeed, changed John Britton!

Thirty years ago, when he brought his young bride to the home he had inherited, there was no lighter step than John Britton's; no happier heart than beat in his bosom. He allowed his wife to do just as she pleased.

and as it was her pleasure to minister to his comfort, there was not the least jar in the harmony of the household.

There were pictures on the walls in those days, many of them painted by Agnes Britton herself; and an atmosphere of joy, mingled with melody, made "Brittony" more beautiful than a palace to those who possessed it.

Words are powerless to express the delight of John and Agnes Britton when a son was born to them! And such a handsome child, too, with such intelligent eyes, and such a wonderful forehead! What comfort they took together in planning its future and noting the rapid development of its infantile graces!

It would be distinguished for something—the pride of the house of Britton rested on those feeble shoulders—and, naturally, the choice of a profession was left to John, who preferred the law, as that more surely led to statesmanship. To have a son of his assisting in controlling the affairs of the nation was glory enough for John Britton, and the young Augustus was dedicated to Cæsar long before he was inducted into his first pair of trowsers.

To guide his steps, mentally and physically, was the joy and pride of his father, who found a willing assistant in Agnes, from whom no other children claimed a mother's care. They were devoted to the little fellow, who abundantly repaid them by a degree of precocity that oftentimes alarmed them.

His brain was so fed and fostered that it matured too rapidly, and at five years of age Augustus Britton was a very old man.

It was impossible to look upon him as a child, or to talk to him in any other way than as if he were your equal; and it was a mystery where he had obtained so much knowledge in such an incredibly short time. Not from books, certainly; it was a wisdom they did not possess, and even John Britton himself stood aghast at the wonderful phenomenon.

He had never thought to be the father of an intellectual prodigy; never anticipated that his son and heir might be the worthy successor of such men as Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, or Charles Sumner! Already he began to assume a dignity compatible with his position, and walk in the glory reflected from

the crown the "Prince Imperial" was some day to wear.

Ah, the splendor of those dreams, to which Augustus, by his brilliant progress, lent some show of reality! Was not Agnes Britton proud to be the mother of such a boy, who could read Virgil at ten, and was prepared to enter college at thirteen?

And yet the mother-heart was "troubled about many things." This baby had so soon grown away from her, so very early ceased to yearn for the sweet refreshment found within a mother's arms, at such an unripe age had assumed an independence and indifference to the ministrations of affection, that Agnes had frequently been tempted to wish she had been the mother of a less-gifted son.

It was all very well for John to push the boy; he had none of that instinctive longing for something to pet and purr over; ambition would fill every aching void in his nature; but what can compensate a mother for the loss of the baby who has outgrown its love for her?

The boy came back from college all too soon; with hope and ambition, future glory

and prosperity, the splendor of a grand achievement, consummated by death. The casket was too fragile for a spirit that expanded so rapidly, and in breaking brought woe and desolation to "Brittony."

The shock made another man of John Britton, who became moody and taciturn; made an angel of poor Agnes, who might have been hindered in her heavenward flight had her husband been able to give her the comfort and companionship she needed; and in the passing out of two souls all grace and beauty vanished from the house. He had had it daguerreotyped, that it might be handed down to posterity as the birthplace of "the Hon. Augustus Britton," and now the very sight of the picture was a reproach to him.

Joanna came to keep house for him, and Joanna was straightway ordered to remove every thing from the walls, every little trinket that had belonged to Agnes or that would remind him of her, and then the house was thoroughly renovated. To superintend the papering and painting was more of a diversion than he had imagined it could possibly be, and in

the course of a few years he had so conquered his grief for the loss of his wife that he was able to supply her place with one who did not resemble her in a single particular.

This was Rena's mother, who hoped that the admiration and respect she felt for Mr. Britton would ripen into love when she became more intimately acquainted with him. But she was too timid, too retiring, to make any advances to win a heart so covered over with the ashes of the departed—so benumbed by a terrible disappointment; and Rena's advent was not calculated to restore the energies shattered by an ignominious defeat.

If he had committed an error in the education of Augustus, he would make amends in Rena's case, notwithstanding the disadvantages of sex; and believing that there might be something debilitating in home influence, he sent her to school at such a tender age that she was more in danger of being spoiled by indulgent teachers than spurred on to any such fate as befell her unfortunate half-brother.

She was seldom at home during the holidays, and the visits made to her at school by

her father and mother were so infrequent and formal that it was a relief when they were gone, and she was able to resume the more agreeable routine they had broken in upon.

Feeling as much like an orphan as if she had long ago buried both her parents, Rena grew up to consider the "Priory" as her legitimate home, and "Brittony" a dungeon, over whose outer door seemed written, "Who enters here leaves hope behind."

It was no worse than she might have expected; but the sudden call to quit her dear school-friends, bound to her by ties of affection and long association, had found her unprepared to accept such an entire change of life. She knew it would be solemn and stupid, but had little idea that her father would subject her to more severe discipline than she had ever been accustomed to. And where love might have won an easy victory, despotism found an unexpected antagonist.

The key remained in the library door, and the one vacant place from which Rena had removed the initial volume still remained as a witness against her. A week had already

elapsed, and as neither her father nor her Aunt Joanna had made any reference to her reading, Rena began to congratulate herself on having so successfully evaded the spirit of the law.

She had been sleeping on the "Elements of Criticism" for at least seven nights, without having her mind affected by its teachings, and was actually terrified when her father began suddenly to question her in regard to the book. She hardly dared confess she had not opened the volume, had not even looked at the title-page, and was ignorant even of the author's name.

She regretted not having a general idea of the book, that she might deceive her father and avoid any further catechising, but there was no alternative but for her to confess her ignorance of its contents.

Rena had never seen her father in a passion, and was really alarmed when she beheld his exhibition of temper.

"You young rebel!" he exclaimed, seizing her by the shoulder. "Do you presume to disobey me in this fashion? You had the mis-

fortune to be born a girl, but I am determined you shall have the mind of a man! None of your namby-pamby nonsensical ways will be allowed in this house, as I intend you shall have a thoroughly classical education. Do you hear?"

Rena was powerless to reply. She felt as if she was in the grasp of something terrible. If the house had seemed like a dungeon to her before, she was conscious of freedom—she could come and go as she chose; but with these shackles on her mind, what was she but the slave of one who knew nothing of a girl's needs or capacities?

Released from her father's grasp, she ran hastily to her own room in such a state of bewilderment and terror that in her effort to reach the bed she struck her head violently against the foot-board, and the pain of the blow removed the pressure from the brain, and started the fountain of tears.

Rena was unused to tears, she had never had any serious occasion for them, and even under these trying circumstances her strong will asserted itself.

"I see it all now!" she exclaimed, in a fit of soliloquy. "I should have been a boy! If Augustus could only have lived! No, I don't wish that! It's a great mercy he died! I wish I had been a boy, for then there would be a chance of my escaping from this prison-house occasionally, and feeling a moderate amount of independence; but when every thing is so distasteful, how can I be happy or contented? I can't stand it!" she added, forsaking her reclining position, and clenching her fists at her invisible foe. "A classical education! What in the world would I do with it? What would Bessie Strattan and Ella Dewint say to such a career? Wouldn't I make a funny strong-minded woman?—spectacles on my nose—no ribbons or ornaments, no frivolous amusements. Why, I should look even more solemn than Aunt Joanna, and there's something perfectly fearful about her solemnity!"

Amused at the picture she had drawn of her possible future, Rena recovered her spirits, and, to relieve her mind, wrote a long account of the stormy interview with her father, and

his intentions concerning her, to her school companion, Ella Dewint, who thought it an excellent joke.

"The idea!" was the united exclamation of the bevy of girls to whom the intelligence was communicated; and I defy any pen to put into those few syllables the expression of indignation, scorn, and incredibility given them by an ordinary school-girl.

"Why not send her to Cornell and have her graduate with a diploma?" said one of the girls.

"Rena Britton at Cornell!" exclaimed another, as if the idea was too preposterous to be entertained; "I think I see her!" and the girls laughed in chorus as they recalled their not over-studious companion, who had a dread of composition-day and no very intense partiality for mathematics.

"Rena is real lovely," said Ella, determined to champion her friend.

"Indeed she is," said another of the rose-bud garden; "but lovely girls don't make strong-minded women. Every body knows that!" and all the girls nodded in affirmation.

"If I'm set for a carnation pink, I don't see

how any one can expect me to come up a sunflower," said Rhoda Leslie, who wrote her compositions in rhyme, and was the acknowledged "poet laureate" of the school.

"And you can't pick radishes off a rose-bush," said Ella, carrying out the suggestion. "I do wish I could quote something appropriate. I'll tell you, girls, let's send Rena a 'round robin;'" and as all the girls favored this unique style of correspondence, Rena was soon in possession of this united offering of sympathy and friendship, which afforded her so much comfort and relief, that she realized some of the minor glory of being a martyr.

She was, indeed, a victim of compulsory education, under circumstances that were especially aggravating, for while she would gladly have increased her store of knowledge, she could not acquire a taste for studies that were uncongenial, and for which she had not the least capacity. Mechanically she opened the book, which was only the beginning of her sorrows, and came upon the following paragraph:

"Except beauty and greatness, novelty has

the most powerful influence to raise emotions. A new object produces an emotion of *wonder*, which is different from *admiration*, because this last is directed to the person who performs any thing wonderful. We cease to wonder at objects with which we are familiarized by time. When any thing breaks unexpectedly upon the mind, it raises our emotion of *surprise*."

"That is very true," said Rena, closing the book, "so I'll keep this where I can become familiar with its appearance, and recover from my astonishment."

Then she opened the volume again to read lower down in the same chapter:

"New objects are sometimes terrible, sometimes delightful; and a threatening object adds to our terror by its novelty."

She threw the book from her with a startled expression.

"This item is the beginning of my classical education!" she murmured. "I shall not find the task delightful! Rena Britton, mistress of arts, must first obtain the mastery over nature!" and it was with a gloomy expression she answered the summons to tea.

CHAPTER III.

TEMMY ANN.

IT is a difficult thing to limit the forces of nature. We may shut up our houses and our hearts, may narrow down our plans and purposes, may uproot all the gay tenants of our gardens, but here and there springs up a dandelion as if to mock us, and the fruit-trees bud and blossom, and May will come into the year with all her sweet suggestions, though we never may call her or welcome her when she arrives.

And so "Brittony" was actually "clothed upon" with the glory of spring-time, and the sun, finding its way through convenient chinks, brightened up the place so that it seemed much less like a dungeon.

But it did not illuminate John Britton, and the only effect it had upon Joanna was to increase her activity toward house-cleaning. She was hardly ever seen without a dust-rag in her hand, except when superintending the cook-

ing; and on rainy or muddy days she had so many bits of carpet lying about that Rena was continually tripping over them.

"You might lift your feet," said Joanna, provoked at these frequent accidents.

"I don't think," replied Rena good-naturedly.

"One doesn't need to think," said her aunt, straightening the bit of carpet that Rena had crumpled up into an unsightly mass. "I don't see where you get your disorderly ways from; I am sure, I'd be ashamed to be so untidy."

"Am I untidy?" asked Rena, looking at herself in the glass.

"I don't mean about your person; of course not; but about other things. You seldom have any method of placing a chair, and you must know you have a very careless way of throwing down your books or any piece of work. You will make a most wretched housekeeper."

"Do you really think so?" inquired Rena, determined not to lose her temper at being rebuked for what she considered "mere trifles."

"Do I think so, Rena Britton? Don't I know it?"

"Well then, Aunt Joanna," said Rena, "perhaps you can relieve my mind by telling me what I am fitted for."

"I'm sure I don't know," said Joanna with a regretful sigh. "I'm afraid you'll be nothing but a great disappointment."

Rena was aware of being that already. She had turned the matter over in her own mind, and could really find no help for the terrible misfortune of having been born a girl, and was quite in hopes that Aunt Joanna would enlighten her as to her capabilities. She, being a woman, would know a woman's capacity, and possibly direct her in channels of industry where she might work out the problem of her being.

But it was hopeless to expect any such assistance from Joanna, who lacked the sympathetic brain and heart which were the sensitive plates on which to receive the true impression of Rena's character. But, as I have said, and as Rena discovered, both her father and her Aunt Joanna were distinct islands,

with which she had no point of contact, no affectionate communication.

Rena found pleasant companionship out-of-doors, and acquired the habit of strolling off in one direction or another, wherever her fancy led her; and after her unsatisfactory conversation with her aunt she felt more than ever like escaping from the weights that seemed to clog her very soul when she was in the immediate neighborhood of "Brittony."

Her life would have been less dreary to her, she would have been less unhappy, had she been gifted with any mode of expressing herself. A few rhymes would have relieved the prosaic programme, or skill with the pencil might have afforded material for thought as well as congenial occupation. But her tendencies were altogether warlike; and in the field she at present occupied she felt compelled to act upon the defensive.

She had never studied the "art of war," knew nothing whatever of military tactics, had no particular taste for such literature, and yet was familiar with the use of weapons not kept in the Christian's armory.

The grounds around "Brittony" were rough and uncultivated, and Rena found it difficult walking there, so she turned toward the village, where she decided to make a few purchases.

There was one little fancy store kept by an old woman whose round face and comfortable figure it was always a pleasure to see. She had such a cheery voice, too, and so many nice stories to tell, that Rena had frequently made excuses for buying a spool of cotton or a skein of thread, when her real object was to have a chat with Temmy Ann.

Her real name was Temperance Ann Nichols, which had, in the hurry of trade, been greatly abbreviated, and gray-headed men and women, the companions of her childhood, as well as little folks, who could claim no relationship, adopted the familiar appellative.

Why, if any one had asked for Mrs. Nichols, Temmy Ann would have denied any knowledge of the woman. For such an occurrence did actually take place, and Temmy Ann told the joke against herself, enjoying it as much as any one.

"Here's my sweet little blossom!" said the

good woman as in reply to the click on the bell she answered the summons to the store, where her ample proportions quite filled the space between the counter and the shelves.

It always amused Rena to see her wedge herself in, and wait upon customers so cheerfully and awkwardly; and many a time her slender arms had brought down a box that was quite beyond Temmy Ann's reach.

"I don't like your looks, my dear," said Mrs. Nichols, regarding Rena with motherly anxiety. "You mustn't be making crosses for yourself, my child;" and her affectionate tone brought a suspicious moisture to Rena's eyes.

Some boys coming in at this moment interrupted the chat, and as they were very particular about their purchases it was some little time before they took their departure.

"That's Blue Beard's daughter," said one, as they were about passing out, and boyish curiosity could not resist an inquisitive glance in Rena's direction, who was unprepared to meet the sudden fire of ten brilliant eyes.

"What did they mean by that?" she said, as if demanding an immediate explanation.

"O, nothing," replied Temmy Ann, busily replacing the boxes she had taken from the shelves. "'Boys will be boys,' you know."

"I don't know much about boys," said Rena, pressing a cool hand against her burning cheek. "I suppose they're all alike."

"Pretty much so. I like 'em. The more real boy there is in a boy the better he turns out."

"And the more real girl there is in a girl the better she turns out?" said Rena, putting the question as seriously as it came into her mind.

"Sure; 'cause they both need the same kind o' seasoning. I never did like make-believe folks nor make-believe things. When I make bread I make bread, and don't put a morsel or so of sugar in and call it cake. It isn't cake, and it is bread, accordin' to my way o' thinkin', and it's just so with boys and girls. Must you go?" she added, unfolding her plump arms, and resting her hands on the counter. "I had something special to tell you, but somehow I seem to have got off the track."

"I'm in no hurry, particularly," said Rena, reseating herself. "Will you tell me all about my father? He seems so unlike other men."

"You don't mean to tell me that Miss Joanna hasn't said a word!" exclaimed Temmy Ann, resuming her former position.

"I do," said Rena.

"Nor your father?"

"No."

"Well, I'd as lief be in a deaf and dumb institution, where the tongue is forever still," said Mrs. Nichols, shaking her head by way of protest against any such scanty use of a lawful weapon; "or 'mersed in a convent. Why, it isn't a bit like living! and I always did say, 'Brittony' was no better than the tombs."

She didn't mean that exactly, but in her rapid talk she was apt to create a confusion of words that did not necessarily cause a confusion of ideas.

"Come into my back room," said she, "and I'll tell you some things you ought to know," and Rena gladly accepted the invitation.

It was just such a cozy apartment as you might expect such a cozy woman would enjoy.

A capacious Boston-rocker stretched out its arms, as if to assure you of a welcome; there were gay prints on the wall, more remarkable for color than any thing else, and yet contributing toward the cheerfulness of the interior; some good engravings also; while the rest of the furniture was of the kind that suggests ease and comfort more than wealth or style.

Temmy Ann filled the rocking-chair completely, and Rena, taking a low chair near her, prepared herself to listen to the history of the family of which she was a member. It was what we have already written, with the addition of sundry embellishments, such as are apt to fasten themselves to stories that are in the habit of circulating around villages.

When the story was ended—all that Mrs. Nichols thought best to tell—and Rena ready to return home, it was raining furiously. What should she do?

"The very thing you want most is what I don't happen to have," said Mrs. Nichols, searching in every nook and corner, in the hope of coming across a stray umbrella. "It isn't often I go out in the rain, and when I

do—" Here her voice was lost amid the folds of her double chin, and it was only reasonable to suppose that when she did go out in the rain some other person's umbrella afforded her protection.

"How fortunate!" she said, giving up the search, and coming forward with a flushed face to wait upon a customer. "You go right around in the neighborhood of 'Brittony,' don't you?" she inquired of a gentleman, who had a paper of needles to purchase for his wife.

"Yes, that's my shortest route," said Mr. Whitworth, the gentleman addressed. "Any thing I can do for you?"

"Well, yes," was the reply. "I'd esteem it a favor if you'd take this young lady under your umbrella."

"With pleasure. It is—"

"Miss Brittony—I mean Miss Britton."

A pitying look passed over the gentleman's face.

"O yes, I remember," he remarked; and under his fatherly care and protection Rena returned homeward, not minding the rain in

the least, and very sorry indeed that the walk was no longer.

He had beguiled the distance by telling Rena about his home and his children, and of the amusements they had; and was sorry enough, he said, that the long winter evenings were over, for there was nothing that kept a family so united as a cheerful fireside.

"But the girls are impatient for summer to come," said Mr. Whitworth, "and so no doubt are you. I suppose you play croquet?"

"O, yes;" said Rena, her eyes brightening.

"I thought so. It will help you to get acquainted with my girls—I have three—and they will be in a hurry to call on you now that I have seen you. Good-bye; I esteem it a privilege to have been a *rain-beau* to Miss Britton;" and with a polite bow and smile he left Rena at her own doorstep, in great danger of demolishing at least two of the commandments.

Was it wicked for her not to "honor" her father? Was it unlawful, if not downright sinful, for her to "covet" what belonged to her neighbor?

She stood for some little time on the front porch thinking over these questions before she remembered she had not pulled the bell, the sound of which sent an icy current through her heart.

Rena had become really afraid of her father ever since she had had an exhibition of his anger over her disobedience, and what Temmy Ann had told her that afternoon did not serve to allay this feeling.

"I can't whistle, or climb, or play marbles," said Rena, going over in the solitude of her own room the long list of boyish accomplishments. "I always cut myself when I use a knife, and never had the least desire to ride on horseback or handle a whip. I don't believe there's a masculine bump on my head; and as for my studying Greek and Latin and Hebrew—like enough!—dear me! dear me!" she exclaimed, clasping her head with her hands, "it gives me the horrors even to think of it!"

Rena had something pleasant to look forward to which would break in upon the monotony of her life, and enable her to get

through her classical studies with some degree of comfort to herself, even though she should prove to her father a most lamentable failure.

He could not reasonably object to her being acquainted with Mr. Whitworth's family, whose grounds adjoined his own, and whose residence was, she thought, vastly superior, notwithstanding its antiquity did not extend as far back as "Brittony" by at least twenty years.

Mr. Whitworth was a younger man than her father, although his hair was white; she felt it more than she observed it in any other way; and while he talked with her she could hardly realize that he was so many, many years her senior. Perhaps he had never had such disappointments as had fallen to her father's lot. Perhaps there was no sepulchral Aunt Joanna to preside over his household. Perhaps he had some treasure her father did not possess; and glad to have so brief a rainbow to brighten up even one day of her life, she pursued her conjectures no further, but found her dreams tinged with what she was very anxious should become realities.

CHAPTER IV.

BLUE BEARD.

AS soon as the spring rains had ceased Joanna Britton was overtaken by the annual fever which, though at its height about the last of April, was still running through her veins the greater part of the year. It was, indeed, a constitutional ailment, for which unlimited doses of soap and water seemed an insufficient remedy. Every carpet in the house was taken up, and every thing already in that position was taken down, and the less like living it appeared to others, the more life and activity did Rena derive from these revolutionary proceedings.

Her services were enlisted, and she found plenty of occupation in dusting books, folding and unfolding articles of wearing apparel, and was amused and interested by chance meetings with quaint garments that might have been portions of Mrs. Noah's wardrobe.

This was what she enjoyed; here she was

able to criticise without consulting any dry old book in order to appreciate the effect of a comparison, or perceive the relations of beauty. Her father might recognize her qualifications as a housekeeper, and release her from the classic shore to which he had driven her; and though she might never be as useful or distinguished as Aunt Joanna—she didn't care to be—she might know enough in time to serve her when occasion required. So she followed diligently in her aunt's footsteps, and was happier than she had been since she took up her residence in the family.

The upper rooms were all in order except the one opening out of her father's, and this Rena had never looked into. She had thrown out several hints in regard to it, but Aunt Joanna never took any notice of them, and excited Rena's curiosity all the more by studiously avoiding that particular locality. What was there in that room that prevented its being cleansed and fumigated, like the rest of the house?

It was a mystery of some sort, sufficient to arouse both her curiosity and her pugnacity.

It was as much as she could do to keep from battering down the door; and she had secretly tried several keys without finding any that would fit the lock.

She could not keep her mind from dwelling upon the subject during the day; and at night, when she was powerless to control her thoughts, they would wander in this one direction, until Rena was made fretful and unhappy by it, and was in very great danger of becoming as morbid and morose as either her father or her Aunt Joanna.

It was her first experience with a "skeleton in the closet," and she was powerless to combat with any unseen enemy; and after filling the apartment with the various creations of her fancy, none of which satisfied her exactly, she decided to make inquiries of Temmy Ann Nichols.

There was nothing more delightful to Temmy Ann than a course of catechism, particularly if it related to the village of Woodford. She had been anticipating a series of questions from Rena, and when she came for the express purpose of unburdening her mind,

Temmy Ann was greatly relieved at being able to discharge her duty to one so defrauded of her rights.

"In the first place," said this good-hearted gossip, who was not above talking to herself when there was no better company around; "in the first place they'd no business to keep any such thing in the house; it's pisen, and pisen isn't good for any body. Thank fortune! there's no skeleton in my house—and I haven't got a secret that's worth keeping. Bless the Lord! all my sorrows are underground!" and Temmy Ann wiped her eyes with a corner of her apron.

It was but a day or two after this soliloquy that Rena came hurriedly into the shop, where she did not pause, but penetrated immediately into the back room, where she found Temmy Ann putting together some pieces of patchwork.

"Well, now!" she exclaimed, her eyes brightening at sight of Rena, but overshadowed immediately with anxiety as she observed the change that had taken place in the girl. Her eyes were hollow, and rimmed with

darkness, looking more like dim lamps in dismal caverns, than head-lights to reflect joy and hope and youthful courage.

"It's a long day since you were here last," said Temmy Ann. "I thought you were sick, like enough: took cold maybe that rainy day; and, indeed, you look as if you'd had a heavy fit of sickness, miss. I doubt if the air of 'Brittony' is as wholesome as it might be."

This was the match that set fire to Rena's brain and loosened her tongue from the restraint imposed upon it by the power of example.

"We've been cleaning house," said Rena, her face flushing red as she approached the subject she was about to unveil. Then, with a desperate resolve, she inquired, "How long have you lived in these parts, Temmy Ann?"

"Nigh on to fifty year."

"Then you know all about every body."

"Pretty much, that's a fact," said she, setting two patches together with exact precision. "It's just as impossible to keep a secret in a village as to keep a bee from buzzing.

It's bound to leak out somehow, and it seems to me what folks try the hardest to hide is the very thing that's found out first. I'd be nothing but skin and bone if I had a mystery to fret over," she continued, giving Rena an opportunity to recover her calmness. "What folks think is curiosity is nothing more nor less than sympathy, when you get better acquainted with it; and I can't see how they can shut their doors against it. What's that somebody says? I ain't no hand at remembering such things, but this was so true I couldn't seem to forget it: 'A sorrow shared is a sorrow divided.' Don't I know it? Haven't I seen it many and many's the time? Why, when my old man died the whole village went in mourning, and it wasn't so hard to be left a widow when every body had a word of comfort, and every hand a grip that said, 'I'm sorry for you!' No, dear, the chastisements of the Lord are not grievous, if the Lord's way is taken, and the 'peaceable fruit' let alone. But it comes nat'ral for some folks to plant the root of bitterness along side the rose of Sharon, and they don't know one from t'other."

"I came to ask you," interrupted Rena at this point, "I want to know if there is any skeleton at 'Brittony,' any sorrow that I am not permitted to share?"

"Like enough," was the reply. "It's a house where ghosts would be likely to congregate. Have you seen any?"

"I have seen enough," said Rena, "to awaken suspicion and make me anxious to know the truth. If it concerns me it ought not to be kept from me, and yet I can't ask my father or Aunt Joanna to explain the mystery. The air of the house is poisoned, and all the cleaning it has had doesn't remove the unpleasant odor. It seems hard that one's own home should be so much like a tomb;" and Rena sighed piteously, and looked the very picture of despair.

"It is a tomb, and nothing else!" said Temmy Ann, all her motherly feelings aroused by Rena's unhappiness; and taking the poor girl's hand in her own she told her what she knew of the secret so carefully kept from Rena Britton.

"You know what great things were expected

of Augustus, and what an awful blow it was to your father when he was brought home dead. There was a grand funeral, but there was never any grave dug for that boy!"

"What do you mean?" said Rena, her voice sharpened by emotion. "What do you mean? Tell me! Tell me!"

"I thought you'd guess. The boys used to call him 'Gustus Cæsar;' and he was a wonderful child, no mistake; though I don't see as any body's the better off for being embalmed, and kept right under your nose. I'd as soon live in a cemetery; and it aint a healthy place to stay in altogether. It took the life out of two women I'm pretty sure, and three people would be better and happier today if the dead were underground where the Lord meant they should go. Ugh! it makes me shiver to think of it!" and she began stirring the fire, which act made an appropriate break in the story.

This, then, was the secret of Rena's unhappiness—the source of all the misery in the household! No wonder the atmosphere was so gloomy and so unwholesome; no wonder

that smiles were infrequent and laughter out of place!

She knew now why the neighbors did not call, and why there could be no interchange of courtesies. With nothing whatever to attract them, and with such a shadow falling over the threshold, even the boldest shrank from entering "Brittony," and pitied those who were incarcerated therein.

Aunt Temmy's statement was a revelation to Rena; it interpreted many signs and wonders that had disturbed her mind during her stay at "Brittony," and explained the peculiar sensations she had felt without understanding their origin.

Couldn't her father—couldn't Aunt Joanna see how she was affected by such a presence? Did they hope to benumb her sensibilities by familiarity with such a mystery? It had not won contempt from them apparently, and if life was to be so stripped of brightness and beauty, if all the joy of living was to be taken away, and nothing but drudgery and desolation left, why, then, welcome death!

She had never felt particularly interested in

the study of physiology and anatomy, and the sight of a manikin, with which the professor illustrated his lectures, impressed her so unpleasantly that she never really had any good of them. Her interest in science did not extend beneath the surface, and although she might conquer her antipathies, there could be no hearty enjoyment or appreciation of any study that required digging or dissecting.

And here she was living in the very house with something more horrible than a figure of *papier-maché!* worse even than a mummy imported from Egyptian tomb! worse, far worse, than any thing that had haunted her dreams, was this dread horror from which she might never hope to escape.

Did her father think the mantle of his son would the more certainly descend upon her shoulders if the body from whence the spirit had departed were kept above the sod? Or was her father's idolatrous heart unwilling that this precious clay should mingle with the common dust?

These were questions Rena could not answer, and so they kept repeating themselves;

and though she made a show of taking down the books from the library, and had reached the one marked F, she really knew very little of the subject-matter they contained, and sat and turned the leaves mechanically. She was more than ever afraid of her father, with that fear which possesses us when in the presence of any strange creature whose habits are unknown.

A very dismal, unattractive future stretched itself before Rena Britton; and much as she had anticipated an acquaintance with the Whitworth family, that might ripen into an intimate friendship, she was conscious now of a desire to avoid society.

The secret was hers, and its knowledge was not conducive to her happiness. It was like eating the forbidden fruit, and the shame that ensued made her feel as if she were already an outcast from the pleasant things of this world.

Fortunately the Whitworth girls were detained at home, and Rena had an opportunity to indulge in her morbid feelings without fear of remark or interruption. Had she been a walking ghost, Aunt Joanna would have failed

to observe the physical change; and so the listless step, the pallid cheek, the capricious appetite, together with other indications of a "mind diseased," were not noticed or ministered unto, by one so accustomed to unhealthy conditions.

She knew nothing of working out problems for other people, and if the salvation of a soul depended on Joanna Britton, the poor creature would have to perish unless it could be accomplished by material aid. She could make a bed, or cook a meal, and was likewise handy with her needle, fulfilling, literally, the injunction, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might."

Joanna Britton was a veritable *hand*-maiden, who had no idea of heart-searchings, and was as cold and distant in her intercourse with Rena as if the two were foreigners who had never learned the same language—and never intended to. It was as if she had no human side to her heart, which had become petrified by the same process, perhaps, that had effected a similar change in her nephew.

Rena took counsel only with herself. She

was under the sway of a powerful impulse, to which she would yield but for one obstacle. She could not return to the school and accept any position that would make her an object of curiosity. She would rather, by far, solicit charity of strangers. "It isn't charity I want," said Rena, confiding her plan to Temmy Ann Nichols. "I know I can take care of myself, but I must have a home!"

"I can't blame you!" said her friend. "Here's for good luck!" she added, kissing her respectfully on her forehead; "and may you never want a friend so long as my head's above ground! Wait a minute!" and she took an advertisement out of her pocket-book and handed it to Rena. "Many a girl goes astray in a big city, but with the right kind of pluck, dear, you'll most always meet with the right kind of luck. Howsomedever, it's well to be on the safe side, and I cut this out of the paper thinking it might serve somebody a good turn."

It was just what Rena needed, and she put it carefully into the inner pocket of her *porte-monnaie*, feeling that every hinderance was dis-

posed of, and the way made clear. Her resolution was taken; and when Joanna went to see why Rena failed to answer the summons to breakfast one morning, she found the room unoccupied, and not even a brief line to tell why or whence she had disappeared!

CHAPTER V.

THE HELPING HAND.

"I NEVER saw any one like you, Melzie," said Tom Rhodes, in reply to a proposition that had been made by his sister. "You always must have some pensioner to look after, or you're perfectly miserable. I declare you ought to have a position under government."

"To keep up the pension bureau?" said Stephen. "I rather think her services would be declined with thanks, for she'd do all she could to add to the number of George Washington's body-servants, and the veterans of 1812 would live forever."

"Now, Steve!"

"It's so, Melzie: you know it is. *Phil*-anthrophy is your forte;" and the accent on the first syllable brought a rosy blush to Melzie's cheek.

"I like Phil," said Tom, who was always ready to take his sister's part when any one

else was teasing her; "he's a first-rate fellow: Phil-anthropy, Phil-harmonics—"

"Any thing but Phil-osophy," chimed in Stephen. "He is the driest old fellow I ever came across!"

"But a very useful chap," said Mrs. Rhodes, "and one whose acquaintance we should strive to cultivate."

"Well, mother, you ought to be able to recommend him, for you've been life-long companions, I guess;" and Tom rested his hand with a very loving touch upon his mother's shoulder.

"Yes," said Mrs. Rhodes, with a smile that had not the shadow of a regret to mar its sweetness; "Phil and I became acquainted when I was quite young, and we have taken sweet counsel together."

"I should as soon think of keeping company with a grindstone," said Steve. "The very sight of a philosopher, (with one exception,)" he added, parenthetically, and politely, "always makes me feel as if I was labeled—'warranted to shrink.' They have such a be-littling way with them."

"I don't think so," said his brother, who partook more of his mother's temperament, and was interested in the vital questions of the day. "Association with great minds has a tendency to increase our desire for knowledge, and to lift us up, as it were. I feel as big as any body when I'm in the neighborhood of an intellectual giant."

"That's modesty," said Steve, suspending operations with his pencil.

"I think Thomas means this," said Mrs. Rhodes, who enjoyed these discussions, as it gave her an insight into the character of her children; "the ability to comprehend a superior thought brings one almost to a level with the thinker, and what we read nourishes us and increases our mental and moral stature."

"O, mother!" said Steve, who loved dearly to provoke an argument, "if you put that idea into Tom's head he'll be hobnobbing with Tyndall and Proctor, until he can't do any thing else but see stars."

"No danger," said Tom; "my taste doesn't lie in that direction. Do you suppose, Steve, if you should scrape acquaintance with Doré,

or any of that ilk, you could *canvas* a much larger district than you are able to do at present?" and he pointed a rather contemptuous finger at the scrap of paper covered with pencil-marks.

"He can try," said Mrs. Rhodes. "I have great hopes of him."

"O, I don't discourage small beginnings!" said Tom, who seldom had much advantage in an argument with his brother. But Steve was sensitive on the subject of art, and found it much easier to play off jokes on others than to parry any thrust made against his specialty. In this he proved his weakness as well as his devotion, and Tom was sorry enough after he had spoken, when he saw the effect it had upon Steve, who was the genius of the family.

"Well, after all this philandering with the philosopher," said Mrs. Rhodes, "Melzie's proposition remains unanswered."

"It's only laid on the table," said Tom, "during the excitement of the debate. Shall we call the meeting to order and put the question? No reply? Then it's lost; and I move the meeting be adjourned."

"Tom is practicing for the position of speaker to the House," said Steve, recovering his spirits as soon as he saw an opportunity for chaffing. "Wouldn't he be an ornament to Washington society?"

"Indeed he would," said Tom, with a hearty laugh; "but all *Rhodes* don't end in that direction;" and the meeting broke up rather disorderly.

Before I mention Melzie's proposition, which was laid on the table without the strictest regard to parliamentary rules, I must give you some account of the family to which you were rather unceremoniously introduced. Mrs. Rhodes had been brought up in the lap of luxury, and enjoyed all the advantages of the best schools and the best society. Her married life brought her an increase of happiness, and she had hardly a single wish ungratified. The long and serious illness of her husband reduced their income, so that at his death she was left almost penniless, and with three children to provide for; and she who had once been envied for her position and possessions, was now spoken of with expressions of pity.

Her boys had not completed their education, and certainly the daughter had made no provision for any such change of circumstances! So the world said, and wondered at these people who could cheerfully resign all the advantages and associations of wealth, and consent to be numbered among the poor. They might have maintained a sort of shabby gentility, and kept up an outside appearance of respectability. But Mrs. Rhodes was too sensible a woman, too thorough a Christian, to think for a moment of leading so precarious an existence.

"It is my cross," she said, "and I must bear it!" and bear it she did, with a braver heart than have many to whom such a change was neither so great nor so embarrassing. She was not gifted in any extraordinary way, but leaned with a wholly child-like spirit upon Him in whose strength she walked, and by whose counsels she was directed, and astonished herself more than she did her friends by the readiness with which she adapted herself to circumstances.

If she felt any sorrow at her changed con-

dition, it was altogether on her children's account, and both she and the boys grieved over Melzie's misfortune. But Melzie begged them not to waste any sympathy on her; she was glad of an opportunity to earn something, and to put what talents she had to some practical use. She was fond of children, and thought to relieve the family of any care of her by taking a position as nursery governess, being urged thereto by a friend who knew of a want in that direction she was well qualified to fill. The result was the following letter:

"DEAR MISS RHODES: Through Mrs. Giles I have heard that you are desirous of obtaining a position as nursery governess. I am anxious to engage some person who will relieve me in a measure in my care of my brother's four children. The youngest will be four years old this month, and the eldest was seven last April, two boys and two girls. If you come to me I would wish you to have the *oversight* of the entire four. The two girls I would wish to sleep in a room adjoining yours, and you would have the entire care of

them in the way of washing and dressing them every day, and bathing them twice a week. The chambermaid would attend to the washing and dressing of the two boys. The children are too young to appear at the table with their father, therefore I should wish you to take your meals with them.

"I would wish them to be taught for an hour or two each day. The two eldest have been to school and are equally far advanced; the two youngest do not know their letters and, of course, could not be confined in the schoolroom more than half an hour each day. They take their daily walk during the winter from half past eleven till a little after one—they dine at half past one o'clock. I would also ask you to look over the children's clothes each week, and do what mending is required. I would not wish you to take any of the duties of housekeeper upon you except, of course, in the absence of my sister and myself, when you would take the entire charge of every thing. I have been thus explicit, so that you might understand fully what would be your duties should you come to me. MARTHA T. FLINT."

It would be difficult to describe Melzie's emotions as she finished reading the above document. Could she sacrifice herself so completely, and become nothing less than a domestic drudge? Was this her dream of independence?

"Melzie," said Mrs. Rhodes, "there is no use of fretting about it, I should never let you become any such bond-woman."

"O, mother!" cried Melzie, with a sob of disappointment and despair.

"I know what you thought, and I am even more disappointed than you are," said her mother. "I have always advocated young girls taking positions in families instead of going into stores. We must be poor ourselves if we want to know how the poor feel about these things, and why so few go into the homes where they are needed."

"Go?" said Tom, throwing down the letter with an angry flush upon his brow. "Go? not while I've breath enough left to protest against it! It's a downright insult to American independence, and no sister of mine shall wear such a yoke as that!"

"I should think any one who pretended to be a lady would be ashamed to send such a 'bill of particulars' to one who has seen better days," was Stephen's observation. "Will you show it to Mrs. Giles?"

"O no," said his mother, "it wont be of any use, and Mrs. Giles is not responsible for the peculiarities of her friends."

So it ended in Melzie's taking a position in a Broadway store, where she had her evenings to herself, and could enjoy the companionship of those she loved. It was no hardship to endure poverty when every crust was sweetened with the joy of sharing it together; and Mrs. Rhodes took to dish-washing and scouring as naturally as if she had been educated at a training school. And as for her cooking!—and the nice little dishes she concocted out of —well, fragments!—surprising the children with some ingenious compound, which they guessed was made of spiders' webs, or nightingales' tongues, or other airy fabric! the beauty of it is not to be put into words.

No one ever saw Mrs. Rhodes repining over her lot, or weeping over the graves of de-

parted joys. She had lived her past; and if the present had in it an unexpected amount of drudgery, she had a future to look forward to where rest would be abundant.

And it was loving service in which she was engaged, and that took away all idea of bondage, and sanctified the most menial employment. Poverty had its compensations, and Mrs. Rhodes could not but confess that the trials through which they had passed, and the few rooms they now occupied, were the means of bringing their hearts closer together and uniting their interests in a way they might never have known had they continued the heirs of fortune and the slaves of fashion.

The removal to another city from the one where they had spent their more fortunate days enabled them to avoid distressing those who knew not what manner of recognition to give people who had fallen from their "high estate," and also relieved them from the mortification of being patronized.

"I never was prouder in my life," said Melzie, disclaiming any feeling of shame, "and I couldn't be with a nicer set of girls than

there are at Madame Hawley's. Madame is a Christian herself, and treats as Christians the people she hires. We have a nice place to eat our lunch in, and a good cup of tea besides, and, what a good many other saleswomen are deprived of, a chance to sit down whenever we are not waiting on customers."

"That is a comfort," said Mrs. Rhodes. "I always feel so very sorry for those poor girls who are obliged to stand behind the counter all day long! No wonder they are pale and haggard and older than their years. And who is this girl, Melzie, you have taken such a fancy to?"

"Her name is Rena Britton, mother, and that is all I know about her."

"And yet you propose bringing her into your home? It is a dangerous move; and she may be better off where she is."

"I don't think so," said Melzie; "she never says a word about herself, and is so full of pluck and energy that I can't but admire her. She impresses herself upon me; and she is a born lady, mother, you can see that."

"That may be, daughter, but I am a little

afraid, under existing circumstances, to entertain strangers even of distinguished pedigree."

"She is boarding in an institution, mother dear," said Melzie, in her most coaxing accents, "and you must know how cold and cheerless such places are for those who have been accustomed to the refinements of life, to those who have ever known the comforts of a real home."

Mrs. Rhodes's objections were slightly moved by Melzie's persuasions, and disappeared altogether when Rena called one Sunday afternoon, at Melzie's request, and impressed herself upon the mother as much as she had upon the daughter. Her past seemed as completely at an end as Melzie's, and she had less pleasure in dwelling upon it. To the latter it was a faded bouquet which still perfumed the casket in which it was laid, every flower and leaf having once been fragrant, fresh, and beautiful; while Rena remembered only to wish it were possible wholly to forget.

Rena, who believed herself a child of misfortune, could hardly reconcile herself to such a piece of good luck.

"I'm afraid it isn't true," she said to Melzie, and repeated over again to herself, "It's too good to be true!"

"It's just a Helping-hand Society," was the reply. "We're poor, and we're not ashamed of it; and if you can put up with small quarters you're heartily welcome, Rena."

"Small quarters! Why it's the big things —the great empty spaces—the immense distances, that terrify me!" was the response. "I'd like to get into a corner so small that I could feel the nearness of any body. I think seriously of adopting a cat!"

"Rena!"

"You may say 'Rena' with three exclamation points if you choose, if that will convince me that I am a human being and not a graven image!"

"Nonsense!" said Melzie, whose affectionate disposition won her hosts of friends; "see if this will not suffice;" and, to the astonishment of Rena, she gave her a hearty kiss.

CHAPTER VI.

"BRITTONY."

JOHN and Joanna Britton looked at each other across the breakfast-table on the morning of Rena's disappearance, very much as you have seen two stone images stare at each other across some intervening space.

There was no doubt about it; Rena had left the house for good and all. How she had dared to do it, and what was her destination, or rather her ultimate intention, if she had any, were mysteries that the two were pondering over as they partook their cheerless repast.

"Girls are not fit to live!" was John Britton's exclamation, as he pushed his chair back from the table. "Not fit to live! They bring sorrow and trouble upon every body they have any thing to do with. I wish she had died!" and he struck his clenched fist upon the table with such force that the dishes rattled audibly.

Ah, John Britton, you had shown in every way possible that the dead son was far more precious to you than the living daughter, and, shutting the door of your heart against her at the beginning, had brought this disgrace upon your noble house! For, if the truth were told, it was John Britton's pride that was most seriously wounded.

"Joanna, don't you shed a tear!" was his injunction to his sister, whose eyes exhibited no inclination to weep, the fountain of feeling had been dry so long. "She's a good-for-nothing, ungrateful girl, and will have to repent of this step in sackcloth and ashes. There have been prodigal sons before this, and prodigal daughters, too, and it wont be many days before Rena Britton is brought to the dust!" and it seemed to afford him some gratification to think that so haughty a spirit should be brought low before him, and made to confess the error of its ways.

"I'll humble her! I'll teach her to know her position, and to realize the penalty of despising such advantages as she has had!" and, pacing up and down the floor, he gave exer-

cise to his wrath, and had no thought of forgiveness or extenuation of Rena's guilt.

She had sinned against him and his rights, against her own self-respect and womanly intuitions. Of his own short-comings he never allowed himself to think; that he had driven her away never entered his mind.

But there were many people in the village who ventured a guess, and hit the truth.

The Whitworth girls called, and were surprised not to see Rena, whose acquaintance they were desirous of making, and whom they had calculated upon in all their out-door sports.

"I'm not a bit surprised," said Mr. Whitworth, when told of the result of their visit. "It was sure to come, sooner or later."

"What, father?" chorused the girls.

"Another death in the family," was the solemn reply. "I saw the shadow upon her face the day we walked up the street together. It is sad, very sad, and I wonder how John Britton can bear it as he does."

"Why, father, you're enough to scare a body to death!" said Rosa Whitworth, with a laugh

that must have dispelled a considerable amount of gloom. "There wasn't any crape on the door at Brittony! You talk as if Rena were dead."

"I'm afraid she is, my child. I had my doubts if she could live long in that house, and they are all confirmed by her sudden disappearance."

"O father, you make me shudder," said Madge, the second daughter, clasping her hands together in an attitude of entreaty. "Please don't. I dislike even to think of funerals."

"The real ones are not half so distressing as those that occur in families from whence love is entirely excluded. There is no real life without it, and it is just as necessary to us as food and fresh air. I don't blame poor little Rena for breaking away from so wretched a dungeon."

"That's what I thought it looked like," said Rosa, "when I rang the bell; and didn't Miss Britton look just like a jailer, girls? I was rather glad of Rena's absence, for I didn't feel the least bit inclined to enter in and be polite,

when every tooth in my head was chattering with the cold. It did really seem as if there had been a funeral in the house, and I wonder any body can live there at all! Mother, I'm glad you have some flesh on your bones, and don't look quite so much like a walking skeleton as Miss Joanna Britton."

"It isn't the flesh, Rosa, my child," said her father, resting his eyes affectionately upon the good wife, "but the spirit that illuminates it. Could any one be thinner than your Aunt Eunice?"

"O!" exclaimed the girls in a united chorus, leaving Rosa to continue as spokeswoman. "Why, no one ever thinks whether she weighs one hundred pounds or two hundred, she is so lovely."

"There it is," said Mr. Whitworth, smiling. "It isn't the flesh that is 'weighed in the balance;' it isn't how we look that makes the difference, but what we are."

"Well," said Rosa, "Aunt Eunice is a notable exception; there are not many made like her, I guess."

"I have some slips growing," said Mrs.

Whitworth, "that I have good reason to think will be worthy relatives of hers."

"I don't know about that," said Rosa, lifting her plump shoulders, while Madge and Flora looked equally incredulous.

"If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit."

"There couldn't be any one just like Aunt Eunice," said Madge, as her father closed the book from which the text was read; "in every way, I mean."

"Perhaps not; but there would be a spiritual resemblance. A sort of *unison*," he added. "God giveth the same spirit to each individual, but it is not always used in the same way; nor does it matter, so there is harmony."

In other homes besides this one in the village of Woodford, and beyond it, Rena Britton's disappearance was commented upon, and made use of to point many a moral.

Temmy Ann Nichols was in the retail business, as regards tape, pins, and all the little *et cæteras* in that line, but in the matter of gos-

sip, as I think I have mentioned before, the trade was strictly wholesale.

Over her small counter the measure was taken of John Britton and his sister Joanna, who were no great favorites in the place; and when it was told, with many nods and shakes of the head, what that house contained, it was a mystery no longer why Rena had turned her back upon it.

"It's a wicked shame!" was the universal comment; and those who lived in an opposite direction invariably went out of their way in order to pass the gates of "Brittony," that were never known to stand invitingly open.

It was not altogether a love of gossip that induced Temmy Ann to scatter it broadcast in this fashion. She had become very fond of Rena, had felt a real sympathy for the poor child so shut in from social intercourse, and shut out of the hearts whose natural right and bounden duty it was to soothe, comfort, and protect her. She was powerless to defend Rena, or to make a sufficient excuse for her, unless she told the whole truth, and nothing

but the truth. So Rena went up in the scale of justice as her father went down, and as he was a man who had never looked to his neighbors for sympathy, he was not likely to miss what he never had. Even the nickname of "Blue Beard" was rather an honor than a reproach, although it deepened the frown on his forehead and increased the scornful expression about his mouth.

"I wish I had buried her!" was his inward ejaculation; for having a poor opinion of humanity at the best, and of womankind in particular, he realized in how many ways Rena Britton might, if she chose, bring additional disgrace upon the father she had so dishonored.

To leave "Brittony" in such a way was nothing less than a criminal act, the beginning of a sinful career! Nobility of character, the purity of soul that is a woman's safeguard, honesty of purpose, integrity, and right-mindedness, were to him conspicuous by their absence from the opposite sex.

Rena, educated according to his plan, elevated from the natural position of woman by

her intellectual development, might have attained eminence in some profession, and reflected great honor upon her instructor. For Rena, in her present state of immaturity, to forsake her allegiance and the home of her ancestors was ruin—inevitable ruin!—and her father was as much a pagan as if the Ganges flowed by his door, and he had thrown his daughter into it very shortly after her birth, as a reasonable sacrifice to the god he worshiped.

The return of summer made some improvement in the outward appearance of "Brittony," covering its scars with a mantle of green, and making cunning little nooks for birds to hide in and build their nests. Occasionally the fearless intruders would hop upon the window-sills, and trill their songs as boldly as if they were an invited orchestra, and expected to be paid for their services. But not even a crumb of bread rewarded them, and they turned their heads about and twittered, and sung the louder, as if they had come to the same conclusion that every body else had:

Nobody is living here;
Nobody at all;
At the windows none appear
Answering to our call.
Though we sing our sweetest songs,
Though we gather here in throngs,
There's no welcome—Love must roam,
So there's nobody at home!

If a little bird should come
To your window-sill,
Give him now and then a crumb,
Just to pay his bill.
Sweeter then will be the song
He will sing when days are long,
And afar he will not roam
If there's somebody at home!

Little birds forsake the North,
When the winds blow cold;
Hearts as surely sally forth,
When Love waxes old.
Old and cold the dwelling-place
Where Love never shows his face;
Should he, like a truant, roam,
Then there's nobody at home.

Joanna had no fondness for birds, or she would have spoken kindly to these little feathered friends, and made something of an effort to interpret their songs. But if she had loved birds she would have loved flowers and other

pleasant things, for we cannot say to the heart "Thus far shalt thou go, and no farther," or put a limit to its likings if we have once permitted it to have its own way.

Rena's disappearance was no more than the escape of a bird from a cage. Her aunt missed her, of course, but felt no tender yearning toward her brother's child, no alarm lest she might have fallen into some of the many snares that are spread for the feet of the unwary. Motherhood was left out of Joanna Britton's nature, and the lack of it made her what she was—a cold, hard, unsympathizing woman, who preferred solitude to communion with either saints or sinners. So whatever change the seasons might produce in the outward appearance of "Brittony," there was no perceptible improvement within, where every thing moved on according to rules as unalterable as the laws of the Medes and Persians.

Even gossip held its tongue in Joanna's presence, for her intensely black eyes and rigid lips were sufficient to deter the most inveterate scandal-monger, and Temmy Ann herself acknowledged a feeling of awe when-

ever she encountered "Blue Beard" or his sister; though, when out of their presence, she did not hesitate to express herself very freely.

"They aint human!" she averred; "they're just corpusses, that's what they are, and I don't blame Rena for leaving 'em! They ought to be underground long ago, so they had!" and her indignation was so great that it actually brought tears to her eyes. "They're mighty honorable about paying their debts, and wouldn't cheat a body out of a penny; but there's some debts they aint particular about paying, and as for cheating!—let alone the undertaker!—" and Temmy Ann filled in these pauses in her soliloquy with most suggestive sighs and gestures.

I think it would have been more to her peace of mind had "Brittony" passed into oblivion as quickly as did Aladdin's palace, or the more substantial glories of Herculaneum, although there might have been serious objections raised by the inhabitants of Woodford, for what would any village be without its Bunker Hill?

They had given no President to the country; were in possession of no social magnate whose home was the center of gayety and refinement; neither John Brown nor any of his sons had marched to glory through that region, leaving their historical footprints; and no rogue had won political prominence, made himself famous or infamous, so that the shame of his achievements reflected a doubtful honor upon the place of his birth.

"Brittony" alone furnished all these requisites, and was almost as attractive as the Tower of London, or any of those sights one goes thousands of miles to see. It was the "Bunker Hill" of Woodford.

CHAPTER VII.

SPECULATION.

THERE was nothing Mrs. Rhodes enjoyed more than to have her children around the table in the evening, and engage in some congenial pursuit, enlivened by frequent discussions. Steve was usually on hand with some problem which he had knotted up during the day, for the very evident purpose of calling out all Tom's skill in analysis. There were no bones of contention, none whatever; for each one believed the other had a right to an opinion, and was privileged to maintain that right as part of his individuality.

Rena was pleased to listen, but took no active part in any of the proceedings that were so very novel, and yet so very interesting to one accustomed to preserve a discreet silence.

"It seems to me," said Tom, who, Steve declared, always kept his brain in solution, "it seems to me there is a great deal of un-

necessary talk about the co-education of the sexes."

"Why?" asked his mother, taking hold of the clew with this hook of interrogation.

"Because it only ends in contradictions. Here are a dozen or more articles, each one contradicting the other, and not one hitting the right nail on the head."

"Try your hammer, Tom," said his brother, "and clinch the argument."

"I wish I could," was the reply.

"The same rule holds good in this as in other things, in my opinion," said Mrs. Rhodes. "We must study the individual before attempting to enforce a law."

"That is what legislation pretends to do, I believe, but after all it is only a pretense, for with so many to select from the best representative is not always chosen. I never shall forget my visit to Washington. I was only a little boy, you remember, but every thing I saw made a deep impression."

Mrs. Rhodes remembered that visit, and shaded her eyes from the light.

"There was no dignity or apparent decency

in the House of Representatives, and when father spoke to one of the men and called him the Honorable Mr. Somebody, I remember looking at him in amazement. He was the very one who had made the most noise, and used language that brought down the speaker's gavel more than once."

"We must judge no one by his speech, my son. Probably he had the interest of his constituents at heart, and lost command of himself in the excitement of controversy."

"I think he did," said Tom, with a comical look over the table. "He had a wonderful command of language, and very little command of himself. Talking was his forte."

"And walking his greatest feat," added Steve.

"Don't laugh at a man for being overcome by an enemy," said Mrs. Rhodes. "Pity, but don't condemn, since we have none of us overcome altogether."

"Let us return to Washington," said Steve, sharpening his pencil, every movement of which was closely followed by Rena's fascinated gaze.

"In the Senate it was different. There

were dignity and solemnity; a regard for law and order that impressed the lookers on, and made them feel that the country was honored by the conduct of her statesmen."

"'Inwardly they are ravening wolves,'" said Melzie, with a smile that contradicted the quotation.

"That is jealousy, Tom; rank jealousy," said Steve, pointing his pencil at his sister. "Melzie thinks the only way to improve the rank and file is to have them officered by women."

"No, indeed I don't," said Melzie, entering a hasty protest. "I believe in a woman's doing what she is fitted for, and I am not fitted to enter the arena of politics, or to take any commanding position."

"She has been practicing," said Steve, unwilling to lose an opportunity for a slight thrust; "'arena of politics' is good. I believe if Melzie had a fair opportunity and an audience she'd make a speech."

"Who wouldn't!" exclaimed Tom, warming up considerably, "*Orator nascitur, non fit!*"

"Hear! hear!" cried Steve. "I beg to

differ from the previous speaker. I've seen many an orator *not fit* for his position, and many a one gets *fits* for having more language than he has common sense."

It was impossible to avoid laughing at Steve's nonsense, which, like the light breeze across the lake, only ruffled the surface of their talk.

"That brings us back to where we started from," said Tom; "if the individual is capable of taking knowledge in the way proposed, then the experiment is worth trying and the result satisfactory."

"But, my dear boy," said Mrs. Rhodes, "if there were no experiments there could be no results; and sometimes the very thing we rebel against we might adapt ourselves to by a mere forcing of the will."

It seemed to Rena Britton as if all this talk were directed toward her, and yet she was conscious that her antecedents were unknown. This last remark of Mrs. Rhodes was like a flash of lightning across her path, making her start back with a feeling of awe.

She sat in a darkened corner with a flushed

face, mentally reviewing the conversation, and arriving straightway at the conclusion that in certain cases rebellion was better than obedience.

Melzie and Rena were sufficiently unlike to be most companionable, and although Mrs. Rhodes pretended to be jealous of the intimacy, she really enjoyed seeing the two girls together, and unconsciously depending upon each other.

For several evenings after the conversation given above Stephen was absent from the family group, making some important engagement an excuse for his leaving home very shortly after the evening meal.

Mrs. Rhodes felt rather uneasy, although she said but little, for Stephen was lively and fond of gay society, and at an age when it is difficult to resist temptation. Tom called them "taking his degrees," and assured his mother that Steve would be sure to take a higher grade. "He's in the negro-minstrel department now; but because a man blackens his face he needn't be suspected of loving darkness better than light."

It was a great comfort to Mrs. Rhodes, and tended to lessen her anxiety in regard to her wayward boy, to have his elder brother so positive in regard to his ultimate triumph over every besetting sin. Not that the mother-heart really needed any such assurance, for so great was her love for and confidence in her children, that she could not imagine they would make any deliberate choice that involved any serious loss of spiritual power. Still, there was more or less anxiety felt lest they should be tempted beyond what they were able to bear, and the steadiness of the elder son only made Stephen's peculiarities more noticeable.

Several years before, he had taken his degree as "deacon," and was ready to "speak in meeting," or to lead in prayer, and had even organized a home-church, over which he presided with proper dignity and solemnity.

It was an understood thing that he was to be a minister, and with grateful pride Mrs. Rhodes had anticipated the time when she should behold her son a preacher of the Gospel. But untoward circumstances had prevented

his having a theological education, and in some mysterious way his attention was diverted from serious things, and the title of "deacon" became somewhat of a misnomer.

"You were late in getting home, my son," said Mrs. Rhodes, as Stephen entered the kitchen, where breakfast was already prepared.

"Yes; I was detained."

"Have you joined a secret society?" inquired Melzie.

"No; he's studying short-hand," said Tom, not giving Stephen a chance to reply. "We'll have him reporting speeches at the Deaf and Dumb Institute."

This speech provoked considerable laughter, in which even Steve was compelled to join, though with less heartiness than was usual.

"I couldn't have done better myself," he remarked. "Thomas, you shall be Professor of Satire, in the Iron-ing Department of the School of Swells. I don't know any one more capable of smoothing down *ruffled* feelings, or imparting the necessary gloss to one's collar."

"How do you spell collar, young man?"

exclaimed Thomas, with extended forefinger and the attitude of a pedagogue.

"C-h-o-l-e-r, of course," said Stephen, at which reply Thomas immediately resumed his seat, and continued his repast.

These pleasant interruptions were constantly occurring, and Rena, if she failed to take any active part, manifested her hearty appreciation, and was conscious of the home feeling that is so agreeable to those who have known what it is to be homeless.

Stephen still continued his absences from the home circle during the greater part of each evening, and wore such an ill-concealed look of distress and anxiety, that even Melzie and Rena could not fail to observe it, and speculate upon its cause.

"Don't fret," said Rena. "Every body has some trouble he can't share, and the way to help him is not to notice. Steve is all right, in my estimation."

"So he is in mine," said Melzie, letting down her back hair. "I am very fond of both my brothers."

"There's no need to mention the fact," ob-

served Rena. "I never saw a family more given to expressing their likes and dislikes than yours."

"I know," said Melzie, "it's a way we have. I suppose we have the appearance of a 'mutual admiration society,' and are doubtless laughed at very frequently, but I can't help it."

Rena sat on the edge of the bed, apparently lost in thought, and allowed Melzie to continue her evening meditations.

"Some families are so disunited; they never appreciate the meaning of the word home, and are more contented anywhere else than under the parental roof. I think it is for want of a centralizing power. How Tom would laugh if he heard me philosophizing in this way! But I've often noticed where there was no central sun, a luminary, like mother, for instance, there was no centripetal force, but rather a centrifugal one—a flying off."

"Some people are born vagabonds," observed Rena, with but little change of countenance.

"Indeed they are," was Melzie's reply. "No

amount of home influence would have the least effect upon them; and it is a comfort to know that my brothers are not of that sort. Perhaps Steve is in love!" she exclaimed, as if it were a sudden inspiration.

"I should doubt the symptoms," said Rena, laughing. "It is an affair of the mind and not of the heart, I guess, although I don't pretend to know much about it or about boys either."

"Then you have no brothers," said Melzie, who had often felt a great curiosity to know something of Rena's family, but never dared put a direct question.

"No," was the response; and Melzie felt checked by this monosyllable, which said so plainly, "I have no wish to be questioned," and liked Rena all the better for her reticence.

"I know what boys are like," said Melzie, as she turned out the gas and slipped into bed, for she was timid about speaking on moral topics, and glad of the shelter of the darkness. I know that if you saw a boy going down hill and attempted to pull him

back by main strength, he'd jerk away and go straight to the bottom, if he broke his neck in doing it!"

"Melzie, you're getting excited," said Rena, reaching over a cool hand.

"No, I'm not; and I haven't my mind on any particular person.

> "'The desire of the moth for the star,
> Of the day for the morrow;
> The devotion to something afar
> From the sphere of our sorrow,'

is perfectly natural to every one, and I don't believe that duty consists in doing whatever is most disagreeable to us. If it were so, I should be a nursery governess, and not at Madame Hawley's. We should never have met, Rena."

Two hands joined each other in a clasp that was more eloquent than words; but the heart that beat the loudest was not the one belonging to Melzie Rhodes.

"Madame Hawley never makes one feel one is out at service," continued Melzie, whose tongue was endeavoring to work off some of the excitement of the day, for when

she was the most tired she was the most talkative. "I didn't like her at first—was rather afraid of her—she is so abrupt; but the more I know her the better I like her; and besides being a smart business woman she is real tender-hearted. She ought really to be the matron of an orphan asylum."

"She is better where she is," said Rena, "helping women to help themselves. I hate asylums!"

"So do I; although I anticipate ending my days in an 'Old Ladies' Home.' I'd rather go there than be dependent on those who begrudged the air I breathed."

"So would I," said Rena, and before she could continue her remarks they were broken in upon by her companion, across whose brain a sudden thought had flashed.

"O, Rena! I've been wanting to ask you if you knew about Louise Stanley. She has actually become a Sister of Charity—given up the world entirely, and devoted to good works. She says she has found just the place for which she is fitted, and is as happy as the day is long."

"I didn't know she was a Roman Catholic," said Rena.

"She isn't. At least she doesn't pretend to be, although it looks like it. It's a new order, and the novelty of the thing attracts a great many who can't be religious in the old-fashioned way. The worst feature about it is that you are obliged to withdraw yourself from your own family—literally forsake father and mother—and while you are pluming your flight toward celestial regions they may be going to the dogs. I don't believe our Saviour intended us to do his work in that sort of way; but then, as mother says, 'We must study the individual,' and the right way for one may be the wrong way for another."

"You have more charity than most people," said Rena. "Many are inclined to think there is no way so good as their way, and if you haven't the grace to walk in it you are certainly lost;" and the bitter tone of voice in which this sentiment was conveyed was not lost upon the listener.

"It used to be so," said Melzie, "but we have grown more liberal in these days. There

is only one door to the sheep-fold, but many roads lead unto it. Good-night;" and Melzie Rhodes was soon lost in the midnight of sleep, while her companion kept on the twilight border; her mind and heart in such a disturbed state that she was much wider awake than when she went to bed.

She had frequently thought of telling Mrs. Rhodes and Melzie all about herself, and removing any mystery they might have felt in regard to her; but she had a fear that their judgment might interfere with her own, and so withheld her confidences. The time had not yet come.

CHAPTER VIII.

URSA MAJOR.

FOR some days Melzie Rhodes had been in quite a fever of preparation. Her modest wardrobe, although conducted on principles of good taste, did not contain a single dress that was really suitable for a festive occasion, and an invitation to a party had obliged her to recognize her relationship to "Flora M'Flimsey."

Rena was also invited, as well as other clerks in Madame Hawley's establishment, and for several days there was little else thought of, and customers had good reason for complaining of inattention.

Mrs. Rhodes had retained some remnants of her former grandeur, and with the aid of paper patterns managed to economize material, so that quite a tasteful evening dress was made out of two garments that had seen their best days.

"Isn't she a wonderful mother?" said

Melzie, as she flourished about, and admired her train with somewhat of a peacock's pride. "Who would imagine it came out of the rag-bag?"

"I wish I had a fairy godmother," said Rena, with pretended grief.

"You are going, aren't you?" said Melzie.

"As Cinderella?"

"No; as your own self. I'll take off these fine feathers and be the plainest kind of a jackdaw, if that will make any difference, Rena."

"It would be very foolish in you to try such an experiment. I suppose I ought really to stay at home, but I want to go, and I'm going as a looker-on. Melzie, if you see any one looking at me, annihilate them immediately."

"I will," said Melzie; "but there is no one you need fear but Ursa Major, and he is proof against the lightning even of my glances."

"You will have to explain," said Mrs. Rhodes; "Rena has never heard of that constellation."

"Tom, who is Ursa Major?" said Melzie,

turning to her brother, who at that moment entered the room.

"In which firmament?" inquired Tom.

"The lower, of course. Don't profess ignorance."

"O, I don't. Is it for Rena's information, or yours?"

"Rena's."

"Then I will answer according to the book. He is a man who was born a century too late, and, not being at home himself in these scenes, takes a special delight in making others feel quite as ill at ease. He likes mediæval art, and dresses himself in mediæval taste; and, by way of contrast, I suppose, attends all the parties he can get invited to, and looks very much like a bull in a china shop."

"Not so bad as that, my son," said Mrs. Rhodes. "I doubt if there is danger of his breaking any thing."

"Not hearts, certainly, mother, but there are other things quite as fragile; and it astonishes me that Ursa Major condescends to such frivolities."

"He is an illustration of for-*bear*-ance," said

Mrs. Rhodes. "I'm afraid you'll frighten Rena, if you present him in such an unfavorable light."

"Not at all," said Rena. "My curiosity is aroused, and I shall feel so interested in the lion—no, the bear—of the evening, that I shall forget to be at all concerned about my own appearance."

"He will attend to that. As soon as you enter the room and cast your eyes in his direction you will see that he is *bruin* mischief. He has a passion for asking questions of strangers, so beware! You must read up on the 'Rosetta Stone,' the 'Barberini Vase,' or the explorations of Palestine, or he'll be sure to touch on these very things."

Rena's curiosity was piqued by these criticisms, and her interest in the occasion considerably heightened. Her dress became a secondary consideration, (of so much more importance are people than clothes at any time,) and Ursa Major would, doubtless, appear in bear-skin. She had been cautioned against him, and that was the very reason why she felt such a singular attraction toward

the person who was, after all, little more than a myth.

It is human nature. Warn us against any evil, and we are sure to drift, if we do not steer, in that very direction. Rena had had very little social enjoyment, and meant to make the most of this rare opportunity; and the music, the flowers, the lights, and the people were so confusing and exhilarating that she could do little but gaze and admire.

It was not a large party by any means; if it had been the rooms would not have held it, for they were small and cozy; but it bulged a little into the halls, giving Rena a good excuse for sitting on the stairs.

"I'm just a looker on," she said to Melzie, who endeavored to coax her from her position; "if I'm in there somebody'll be distressed to pay me attention. I shall be awkward in receiving, and more awkward in refusing. Consider me a fixed star."

So Melzie left her to her own will, knowing how impossible it was to move her if once she had made up her mind; and that Rena Britton was eccentric every body knew.

"This is a regular *stair-case*, isn't it?" inquired an elderly gentleman, who took up his stand close beside Rena.

"It *appears* so," was the reply.

"You remind me of that exquisite portion of Lalla Rookh,

"'One morn a Peri at the gate
Of Eden, stood disconsolate,'

without the same excuse for despondency that she had. It's my belief that people stay out of Eden just because they're too lazy—I was trying to think of another word, but that's it—they're too lazy—to enter in."

He had such a pleasant voice and manner that Rena could not avoid lending him her ears, although her eyes were occupied in another quarter.

"Then you think I'm lazy, I suppose, sitting here, and apparently doing nothing. But I am very busy, sir, studying astronomy."

"Indeed!" was the merry exclamation. "Are we to have another Mary Somerville, or Maria Mitchell? It is a divine study," he continued, "for the more familiar we become with Jupiter, Saturn, and Herschel, the more

interested we are in Him who is the bright and morning star. We are all planets revolving around somebody."

"Yes sir—no sir, I meant to say. I am a fixed star."

"You shine, then, by your own light," said her companion, with a quizzical look. "That accounts for your being so *Sirius*."

"I don't understand," replied Rena, interested in spite of herself, and not disdaining information conveyed in such a pleasant manner. "I am very dull of comprehension."

"You are wise to confess it. As they seem to get along very well without us, and the rooms are rather crowded, suppose we amuse ourselves looking through the telescope at these heavenly bodies. We see things not as they really are, but as they appear to us, or according to the mood we're in. Sometimes it's floral, and we call our friends by dear familiar names, Rose, Pink, Heliotrope, Violet, or Pansy, finding in each some faint resemblance to the flower we borrow. The planets are but the blossoms of an upper garden, with names far more significant

than their earthly reflections. Do I weary you?"

"Not in the least," said Rena, who felt that she was being most agreeably entertained.

The music had ceased, and groups of young people stood in different parts of the room, talking earnestly together, while others promenaded, and still others occupied the limited number of sofas and chairs.

"Some of the planets have attendants or satellites moving around them," continued Rena's companion. "There are Mars and Juno standing under the chandelier; and that must be Jupiter whom those four young girls are following so persistently. Yonder is Venus, I take it; she is an evening star when eastward of the sun—for then she *sets* after him! Forgive me! that is dreadful! and enough to upset the center of gravity."

Rena could not resist laughing, for it was Melzie he had singled out, and she would enjoy repeating his remarks, which were not meant to be disagreeably personal.

"That is Saturn, I presume," said Rena, pointing to a young gentleman who made a

conspicuous display of a diamond ring on one hand and a large seal ring on the other.

"Unmistakably. How easy it is to detect likenesses when we set about it! I have been looking for Mercury, but no doubt the light of the sun dazzles my eyes. He is, you know, the messenger of the gods, and is usually hid in the splendor of the luminary around which he revolves. Suppose we call him by a more familiar name. Say that Love is the center of the universe, and Faith the nearest satellite. The one is so bright we can't see the other, except in part: but how warm it is moving around in such a splendid orbit! That is half the joy of living, keeping our hearts warm by getting near the solar center."

"Suppose there isn't any solar center," said Rena, applying the lesson to her own experience. "Suppose—" and here she hesitated.

"If you can't be a satellite," remarked her companion, "there is no reason why you shouldn't be a planet. O, but I am reminded that you confessed to be a fixed star. Every

fixed star twinkles, but a planet does not. Don't be satisfied with twinkling, my dear young lady, when it is in your power to shine with a steadier light. This must be the march of the equinoxes; Orion and Pleiades are changing places, Leo and Cygnus are gliding by, and there will soon be an eclipse I imagine. Did you observe the transit of Venus?"

Rena took the proffered arm, venturing no reply to the astronomical remarks in which sense and nonsense were so closely blended that she was at a loss to know just where to make the division.

She had sufficient good sense to know, however, that much of this *light* talk was intended for her intellectual and spiritual benefit, and was conscious of having been something more than a mere spectator. She had something to think of and remember, and the use of earthly bodies to illustrate heavenly ones brought the subject down to her comprehension, and so wove it in with her daily life that it colored all her thoughts.

She had an orbit to move in, and also the power of imparting light; but had been satis-

fied with giving the very faintest kind of a twinkle.

"What kind of a time did you have?" inquired Stephen at the breakfast table the next morning.

"Splendid!" exclaimed Rena, with sparkling eyes and rosy cheeks; at which confession Melzie and Tom exchanged expressive glances.

"There are no adjectives left for the rest," said Steve; "Melzie, was it a success?"

"Ye-es," replied Melzie, in an uncompromising tone, "nothing extra, and yet very nice and pleasant."

"And Ursa Major," said Tom, "was chained up."

"Ursa Major!" exclaimed Rena, "I had forgotten all about him. Was he there?"

"Of course he was," said Melzie.

"Why didn't you point him out to me?"

"I didn't need to," said Tom, "or didn't want to, rather, preferring you should discover him yourself."

"How mean!" was the reply. "I depended on you."

"Depended on me?" said Tom, shrugging his shoulders. "Not much, I think."

Melzie was convulsed with laughter, but managed to whisper a few words to her mother that deepened the smile on her face, and only added to Rena's confusion.

"How he must have disguised himself if you failed to recognize him," said Tom, thinking that hint quite broad enough to be taken.

"Remember Titania," observed Steve.

"It can't be," said Rena, as the light gradually broke in upon her mind; "you don't mean that I was with Ursa Major all the evening?"

"To the intense relief of those who would rather meet him anywhere than at an evening party," said Tom.

"I felt honored by his attentions," said Rena, coming up nobly to the defense of her friend. "I imagined him to be such a different creature, with bushy hair and beard, and bearish ways—Ursa Major, I mean—no wonder I was deceived."

"Did you really like him?" inquired Melzie.

"Really and truly. I only wish I could re-

member half the good things he said. I shall remember him long after I have forgotten all about Mary Mason's party."

"'I feel like one
Who treads alone
Some banquet-hall deserted,
Whose lights are fled,
Whose garlands dead,
And all but he departed,'"

said Tom, with dramatic flourishes. "I am glad he made such an agreeable impression. He isn't frivolous, I know; rather a heavy-weight on light occasions. I like science where it belongs, but I never would think of introducing Huxley, or Spencer, or John Stuart Mill to a parcel of giddy young girls."

"'Giddy young girls,' indeed!" said Melzie. "By what right do you presume to call us that? Where would you find a more sensible set, I'd like to know?"

"O, if you take up the cudgel like that, I shall retire," quoth Tom. "Steve, can't you come to the rescue?"

"No," was the reply; "I prefer going with the majority."

"That's a *cow*ardly move!" said Tom, with pretended disdain.

"Is it?" quietly remarked Steve; "I thought it related to a *bear*," which put them all in good humor again.

"It shows the foolishness of giving people such names," said Mrs. Rhodes, "until we know whether their character corresponds. I am glad Rena found him out as she did, and it proves how much we lose by allowing ourselves to be influenced in our associations by other people. I remember well the remark made me by a dear friend of whom I inquired the reason why a mutual acquaintance had ceased to interest me. 'She is a thin book,' was the reply, 'which, after we've read and closed the covers, some one else will take up and find really interesting. People satisfy our needs up to a certain point, and because they are poor to us it does not follow they are not rich to some one else, whose needs are different.' I can't recall the words exactly, but that is the idea, and it tendeth to charity."

CHAPTER IX.

LIGHT ON THE PATH.

MRS. RHODES was very busy washing the breakfast dishes when there was a gentle knock at her door, which opened to admit a gentleman of commanding presence, whose face denoted the bearer of good tidings. Indeed, it seemed as if every letter and syllable of the Gospel was so wrought into his being, that it was perfectly easy and natural for him to teach and preach and attend to the salvation of souls.

Mrs. Rhodes felt this while she was offering him a chair in her humble apartment, and wondered what special errand had brought him there.

"You have a son Stephen, I believe," said the visitor.

The mother-heart took alarm on the instant. What had happened to her dear boy? Was he dead? Had this stranger come to prepare her for some dread calamity? Were all the

doubts that her strong faith had dissipated come back to torment her with renewed assurance? She could not speak; she could only sit in dumb anguish, wringing her hands, that shook with every throb of her loving heart.

It was not a long pause, only time to allow her to construct a monosyllable; and yet it seemed an eternity of anguish. Pain and poverty were endurable; what was this thing she dreaded?

Disgrace? What reason has any mother to suppose that the children she has borne so tenderly upon her heart may some day turn and stab her unto death?

There was circumstantial evidence to convict, the bitter experience of others to alarm, besides the knowledge of the insecurity and untrustworthiness of all earthly possessions.

"I congratulate you, madam, on having such a son."

"What do you mean?" she exclaimed, her voice sharp and tremulous under the strong reaction. "Who are you, and what has he done?"

"Is it possible you are ignorant? Perhaps

I ought not to have spoken, but I felt like sharing in your joy."

"Speak!" said Mrs. Rhodes, with a look of powerful entreaty, her mind scarcely comprehending his meaning.

So, quietly, as if he were comforting a child, he began the recital, to which Mrs. Rhodes listened with streaming eyes.

"It was about three weeks ago, I think, I had word sent me to please call at such a number, and see a dying young man. I was told that he was wholly unprepared, must be approached very cautiously, if not with strategy. At my first call I declined seeing the young man, but left a few leaflets—my visiting cards—which might prepare him for an interview. I thought to undermine the enemy gradually, and asked God to bestow unusual grace upon me; but, imagine my surprise, when I did see the young man, to find the work all done—salvation secured, and peace obtained. I sat down at the feet of that dying boy to learn of him. There was no need of my saying a word; the Lord had removed the veil, and already over that placid face shone

the glory that is not of this world. It seems his most intimate friend was Stephen Rhodes, and when this sickness came on no sister could have been more tender or devoted. All the spare time he could get he would spend in the sickroom, talking with his dying friend. It must have been a lovely sight."

"Why didn't he tell me?" exclaimed the poor mother, who was distressed at the evil construction she had put upon her son's absences. "Why didn't he tell me?"

"Boys dislike above all things to make any display of religious feeling. It is their pride —and a foolish one—to be considered rough and unsentimental. And then, you know, a sensitive person is rather loath to let the left hand know what the right hand is doing. Didn't you suspect what was going on?"

"I suspected evil," said Mrs. Rhodes, with a sigh.

"How very, very human that is!" said the visitor, without intending any rebuke. "If a young man is lively and cheerful, we are apt to fear his being led astray; while more frequently the solemn, secretive ones are medi-

tating mischief. O for a new baptism! Well, I must go on to say that Stephen read to his friend, talked to him, and ministered to him in many ways. Dying messages were sent to old associates, begging them to forsake their evil ways, and it was really astonishing how God glorified himself in that dying boy! His death was the entrance into a new life for himself and for many of his companions, who were astonished at his calmness, and hoped for the privilege of such a triumphant departure.

"Your son was sitting on the bed beside him, holding his wasted hand, when he looked upward, as if in prayer, and said in a stronger voice than usual: 'I'm ready to go—and I'm satisfied to go; and I think I'd better go now;' and, as if the will relaxed its hold on earthly things, he passed suddenly through the door that Love had been holding ajar. It is a blessed thing to minister to such a departing spirit, and the impression left upon your son's mind cannot fail to be of lasting benefit."

"I hope so," remarked Mrs. Rhodes. "I intended him for the ministry, but was fearful

his mind had been wholly diverted from sacred subjects."

"How liable we are to be mistaken!" said her visitor, who, after a short prayer, left the mother to her reflections; and they were not sad as regarding Stephen's prospects. The kiss she gave him at night was warm with appreciation and the confession of her own short-comings; and when she privately told Tom and Melzie and Rena, too, of Steve's employment during the past three or four weeks, they immediately condemned themselves for the injury they had done him in their thoughts.

"Who would have imagined our Steve had such courage?" observed Tom. "It is superhuman."

"So it is," said Mrs. Rhodes. "I can understand why the dear boy didn't like to speak about it. He was afraid it might appear as if he were taking credit to himself. It is all the Lord's doing!"

It was only a few days after the events above recorded that Rena's warlike feelings were considerably aroused by the appearance

at Madame Hawley's of a customer about the same age as herself.

As soon as their eyes met the recognition was mutual. It was Ella Dewint! and there was that in her manner that said, as plainly as if words had been spoken, "Stand aside, for I am better than thou!"

Rena felt the slight all the way down to the very ends of her fingers and toes, and was mortified and ashamed of her own weakness. It disturbed the peaceful current of her life far more than any thing that had occurred since she left "Brittony," and she was foolish enough to let it weigh heavily upon her spirits.

"What do you do, Melzie," she inquired, with not the pleasantest face in the world, "when any such thing occurs?" and she mentioned the circumstance narrated.

"Do?" said Melzie. "I don't do any thing, of course. It is part of the ups and downs of life, and I am learning to care very little for Mrs. Grundy, especially if Mrs. Grundy wears silks and laces and I wear calico. It isn't worth while to be too thin-skinned, Rena, and the scorn of such a girl as Ella Dewint is

highly complimentary. I don't suppose she'd work to support herself if she was starving."

"I don't know her capacity," said Rena, thoughtfully.

"No; and she doesn't know it herself, I presume. These things are revealed to us; don't it seem so to you, Rena?"

"I don't know. I haven't given the subject much attention. It seems more of a happen so."

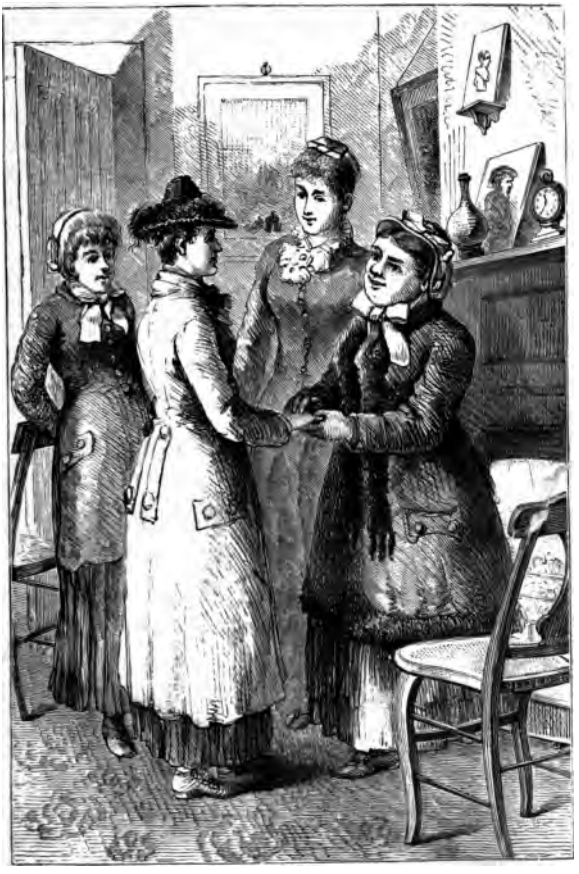
"Do you really think so, Rena?"

"I do—if I think any thing at all. I am always resisting my thoughts."

"Doing violence to the spirit," said Melzie. "If I've got to walk a rough road there's no reason why it shouldn't be bordered with flowers, Rena," she added, tenderly embracing her friend; "don't make yourself more unhappy than is necessary. It is far more honorable to be a shop girl than to be dependent on any one, although I wish I was capable of better things."

"Better things?" observed Rena.

"Yes; if I'd had more capital I could have



Rena Surprised at Meeting Temmy Ann.

gone into a better business—more brain capital, I mean."

"Does your mother consider you a failure?" inquired Rena, with considerable curiosity, for she began to feel that her own experience and Melzie's had been somewhat similar.

"No, indeed," was the laughing response. "Mother says there is great need of womanly women, and I shall probably be nothing nobler than a domestic drudge, and end my days in a chimney corner. My advantages were nipped in the bud; killed by an untimely frost for some wise purpose; for you know, Rena, nothing is allowed to happen without His approval."

It was only a few days after this that Rena, on returning home from Madame Hawley's, found Mrs. Rhodes engaged in conversation with a middle-aged woman, whose broad shoulders served as a screen before the cheerful fire.

"Rena," said Mrs Rhodes, "this is an old friend of yours, I believe;" and Rena turned to recognize Temmy Ann Nichols, while the color that overspread her face and neck made

it doubtful whether she was more pleased or pained.

Temmy Ann's cheery greeting rendered it quite unnecessary for Rena to speak a word, and her silence was not resented by the good-natured gossip, who had evidently started out with some benevolent intention.

She was staying with some friends in the city, and couldn't be persuaded to remain over night, for she had a great deal of shopping to do, and must be back in Woodford as soon as possible.

"You aren't as peart as usual, somehow," said Mrs. Nichols, scanning Rena's face so closely that the color deepened in either cheek. "The city isn't a healthy place for some folks; I always lose flesh when I come here."

Melzie smiled, and thought that a pound or two less of avoirdupois would be an agreeable bereavement.

Rena was conscious that she did not look her best. Steve's noble sacrifice of himself, and her recent talk with Melzie, had made her feel as if her own life was so utterly selfish and aimless, that a look of anxiety had rested on

her face, to keep company with the doubt that held possession of her heart.

"It beats me how things do turn out!" said Temmy Ann, who had a strong desire to unburden herself, and had waited at least five minutes for Rena to ask such questions as she would be likely to ask of any one who came directly from her native place.

"If any body'd told me a week ago that I'd be down here in New York, a-huntin' for a needle in a hay-stack, I should have hooted at the idee. But when it's necessary to do a thing I'm not going to stand around like a heavy-weight, if I do weigh nigh on to three hundred. When every body else stands back then I always feel like pushin' ahead, and it do seem as if the Lord put a dark lantern into our hands when we go peerin' about in his service. We can't see more'n a step ahead, when flash! goes a big ray that lights up a dark corner, and makes it feel ashamed of itself."

"You've lived in Woodford some years, then," said Mrs. Rhodes, taking advantage of a brief pause.

"I can't remember living any where else," was the reply.

"Then perhaps you know Mr. Whitworth's family?"

Rena gave a perceptible start at the mention of this name.

"Know Mr. Whitworth? I guess I do; and there isn't a better man this side o' heaven! Why, I've often said that him, and one or two others, was all that saved that part of the country from being completely gomoralized."

She had no idea of the complete destruction conveyed by this observation, but her limited knowledge of the English language often led her to coin a word that gained in significance what it lost in elegance.

How well Rena remembered that rainy day when she accepted the kindly shelter of his umbrella, and anticipated so keenly the pleasure of an acquaintance with his family! She shuddered as she carried her thought so near to "Brittony"—shuddered as if she had come suddenly upon a grave.

"I didn't know you came from that part of

the world, Rena," said Mrs. Rhodes. "I wonder you didn't speak of it."

Rena blushed and was silent. She had thought she would tell Mrs. Rhodes everything, and had felt for several days as if the auspicious moment was close at hand, but had no idea that Mrs. Temmy Ann Nichols would be the one to break through the wall she had raised between her present and her past.

"It's good for sore eyes to see you, Miss Rena," said the good woman, "though you are not as solid a piece of flesh as I hoped to find. But them that carries burdens always gets stoopy, and kind o' care-worn, and we'll just put a porous plaster on your back, and give you a dose of medicine, and you'll be chipper enough, I warrant."

"Is that what you came for?" said Rena, mustering courage to ask a question that might relieve her curiosity. "Is any one dead?"

"Dead? and me a-laughin' and goin' on at this rate! No, indeed, we've had a resurrection in the place; the dead have come to

life, so to speak, and I had to come right down here and tell you, for it didn't seem as if there was enough folks in Woodford to carry the news to. There's no use pourin' water into a pitcher that's already filled."

CHAPTER X.

A NEW SPIRIT.

"IT wa'n't no surprise to me," said Temmy Ann, leaning forward with her elbows well planted on the arms of the chair, and looking over an imaginary counter. "It wa'n't no surprise to me, for I knowed that the Lord would some day happen in unexpected like, and just show 'em what big fools they'd been all their days. It's his way of doin' things, lettin' 'em go on and manage for themselves till they don't think that anybody can manage half as well, and then, all of a suddent, stealin' a march on 'em, and upsettin' all their plans. It isn't for me to say, 'Sarve 'em right!' I suppose; but I do say it, and can't help it, when them that's thought they was the very lords of creation are made to feel what miserable sinners they were.

"Well, as I was a-sayin', it wa'n't no surprise to me when John Britton had a stroke, and Joanna followed suit. They was always

just like twins; whatever John said was law and gospel to Joanna, and they was both proud; so when the Lord afflicted John, why, Joanna thought, of course, she must do likewise, and more helpless creeturs I never saw.

"I knew of it 'most as soon as it happened; 'ill news flies fast;' so I just shut up shop and went right to 'Brittony,' as if I'd been ordered of the Lord. And I do believe I was. If there's work for any body to do, he generally leads folks up to it; and if they don't take hold and do it it isn't his fault.

"I wondered who would look after things up there; and I thought of this one and that one that the Lord might send, till I was afflicted with such uneasiness that I knew very well the Lord meant I should go. And I went. It seemed as if all the plagues of Egypt had come upon that house, just because of the sin that was in it; and when neither of them could speak that had a right to say any thing, me and Mr. Whitworth had it put under ground. Catch me livin' in a house with any thing like that!"

"I'm so glad! I'm so glad!" exclaimed

Rena, the tears chasing each other rapidly down her cheeks. "What did father say?"

"He didn't say much," was the reply. "I didn't let on for some time, but somehow he guessed what had taken place, and took it easier than we thought he would. As for Joanna, it brought her round in no time, and I never saw such a change in any woman. Your father isn't able to walk about, but uses a wheel-chair, and is as patient as a man of his disposition could possibly be. I thought as how you'd like to go back, Rena, and so unbeknownst to any one I hunted you up—with the Lord's help," she added reverently.

Rena's countenance expressed a variety of emotions, and much as she rejoiced at the improvement that had taken place in "Brittony," she had but little inclination to take up her abode once more there.

"Well," resumed Mrs. Nichols, "I must be going. It's for you to decide, and you needn't be in any haste either, for if the Lord sent me it's just as easy for him to send you."

After she had gone, and Mrs. Rhodes and Melzie had rejoined Rena, she told them Mrs.

Nichols' errand and the strait she was in. Sitting between them on the sofa, and feeling their hearts beating in unison with her own, it was easy for her to tell the story of her trials and disappointments, and her present doubts and fears.

"I can never, never please my father," said Rena; "there is no use trying! There is a species of antagonism between us that can never be done away with, and I am really weighed down in his presence."

"I wouldn't go near him," said Melzie, "until he'd made some sort of advance. Then he'd feel bound to treat you decently at all events! How can he be so inhuman? My father was so loving and kind!"

"Your father was a Christian, Melzie," said Mrs. Rhodes. "Rena's father has yet to be subdued by the spirit of Christ."

"He will never be in subjection to any thing, I fear, but his own will. I am afraid of him," and Rena shuddered as if in confirmation of her words, "really afraid of him and Aunt Joanna."

"Hitherto you may have been, my child, as

it has been two against one, but with the Lord on your side wouldn't you stand a better chance?"

Rena colored, but made no reply. She knew that her own hard heart had been greatly softened by these influences which surrounded her, and the "fighting element" was not powerful enough to lead her out of pleasant pastures into stony places.

"I cannot blame you for leaving home, Rena, for I can imagine what an unwholesome atmosphere must have pervaded the house. There are some things it is expedient to avoid, and I don't believe we are expected to wear the yoke that belongs to the neck of some one else. But now that serious objection is removed, I see no excuse for your remaining here."

"These are sufficient excuses," said Rena, affectionately embracing her friends.

"Don't let us be stumbling-blocks," said Mrs. Rhodes, with tender admonishing. "I am so glad we have helped you, not knowing how much or what kind of help you needed. You may not please yourself in this

work, Rena, but is there no higher work to be done?"

"Not there," said Rena, still overshadowed with a dread of encountering the desolation and desert-fare of "Brittony."

"Take with you a new spirit, and it will become a new place. It is your duty, Rena, and you will be far happier in following this light the Lord has set upon your path than in turning your back against it."

"I wish I could be sure," sighed Rena, still in doubt.

"Sure of what?—of yourself?"

"Yes, and the others."

"Be sure of nothing, or nobody that is in the flesh. Can't you see the finger of the Lord pointing the way? Can't you feel his strength fitting you for the task?"

"I don't know. What if I should fail?"

"Fail? Of course you will, just as you get hungry or thirsty. You are exhausted and need nourishment, but it doesn't follow that the supply has given out, or the fountain run dry. If we didn't fail, Rena, we should never know our need of a Saviour. Be the brave

girl you know how to be, and let your light shine where it is needed."

It all came back to her, what Ursa Major had said on that memorable evening when they studied the stars together. She had been content to be a satellite, or rather a fixed star, and had reserved her own brightness. "Don't be satisfied with twinkling," said Ursa Major, "when it is in your power to shine with a steadier light."

This was her opportunity, but she was not ready to avail herself of it. Resistance was strong within her, and she followed Melzie into the bed-room in no mood for slumber.

As she stepped toward the bureau she saw a piece of paper folded and addressed to her. She opened it with trembling fingers, for the excitement of the evening had agitated her so that there was neither outward calm nor inward quiet.

She read with a heart beating against every syllable:

The easy way is not for me,
From toils and cares and sorrows free;
Where peaceful rivers rise and flow,
Is not the way for me to go.

Though other burden I would bear
Than this that falleth to my share,
I cannot choose my lot, nor see
Why all these things are good for me.

But every day my course I keep
Through paths so difficult and steep,
Knowing that He to whom I pray
Is leading me the heavenly way.

Though creature comforts are but few,
And my desires I must subdue,
Though winds of joy are seldom sent
To lift the curtains of my tent.

It is not meet I should repine,
For all I need is surely mine,
And grace abundant is bestowed
On him who walks a rugged road,

Thus I would live ; and murmur not
At the misfortunes of my lot,
Since day by day I plainly see
The easy way is not for me.

It was an easy way Rena had marked out for herself, and was grieving, even now, that she was not allowed to walk in it; it was so much pleasanter to follow the guidance of her own will than to be under the control of any one else; and she would rather a thousand times go out into some unknown experience, forsak-

ing, if necessary, the holy shelter of this Christian home, than to go back to the dungeon from which she had once escaped.

Rena Britton was in a state of revolt. Mrs. Rhodes had suggested her taking "a new spirit" as an element of strength toward new endeavors; and this hymn, with its easy rhythm, only served to increase her uneasiness. "The easy way is not for me!" Surely Rena's whole life had been a contradiction of any such supposition; it needed nothing more to confirm her belief that woman is born to trouble.

She was long in getting to sleep that night, for she knew that she was expected to come to some decision the next morning, and wished that Temmy Ann had not discovered her whereabouts.

"Meddlesome old thing!" thought Rena, and then the next moment she remembered how kind it was of her to take charge of affairs at "Brittony," and she became more reasonable in her judgment.

From these vacillating moods she passed into a feverish dream, and found herself wan-

dering through mountainous regions, where there seemed nothing under foot but rugged rocks and yawning chasms, nothing overhead but the illimitable sky.

The fascination of the scene deprived her of all sense of fear, and she would stand spell-bound gazing down into some deep, dark ravine, along whose sides she was destined to work her way. At times she stood upon a narrow shelf of rock, not knowing where next to place her foot, when always an invisible, but powerful hand was reached down to her, and she was lifted out of her difficulty and led into a larger place.

These experiences were repeated over and over again, relief coming only when it was needed, and never unsolicited. Just to feel her own helplessness to avoid the difficulty or avert the danger was enough; and when there appeared no way of escape whatever, nothing but a perpendicular wall fronting this black ravine, then the arm was passed around her and she was borne upward as if on strong wings.

At last the rocks were all beneath her feet,

and the clouds, too; her head was in the clearer spaces, and she could see the stars were shining, not twinkling with an unsteady light, but shining broad and full; and as she looked every star became an angel, and as Rena struggled to join the constellation of bright spirits she became conscious that the rocks were sinking down, down, and the sky receding until the stars were only faintly visible in the dim distance.

The shock of descent wakened her and impressed the dream more forcibly upon her mind. "The easy way is not for me!" she murmured inaudibly, and, falling asleep again, the same dream was repeated with but slight modification. It needed but the morning light to convince her of her duty, and, although Melzie protested with tears, and Mrs. Rhodes herself felt loth to part with Rena, neither one could interfere with her going, or say she had not acted wisely.

"I'm not going because I want to," said Rena, when they sat in council, "but because I must. I shall be unhappy there and unhappy here."

"There's where philosophy comes in," said Tom, quietly adjusting his neck-tie.

"No, it doesn't," said Steve.

"Not unless it's of the right kind," observed Mrs. Rhodes. "One needs Christian philosophy to meet such cases."

"Well, mother, did you imagine I meant pagan philosophy?"

"I didn't know," was the response.

"Why, mother dear," said Tom in a reproachful tone, "I am studying science by the light of religion, not religion by the light of science, and there is no danger of my making a mistake."

"I am glad to hear you say that, my son," replied his mother, a happy light diffusing her countenance. "There is such an effort being made to displace the true God and substitute false gods in his place, that it is well for every one to speak up thus boldly, and re-establish his own faith, and fix the faith of others."

"It isn't the speaking so much as the doing," said Steve; "or isn't the doing the best part of the argument?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Rhodes, glad that this

talk had arisen previous to Rena's departure. "There are diversities of gifts, but no soul is so poorly furnished that it cannot serve its Master in some way, and do good service, too. If the tongue is weak, the hand may be strong; and always and every-where there must be exhibited the outward evidence of the inward spirit."

"May you conquer 'Brittony!'" said Mrs. Rhodes, as she said good-bye to Rena; and Rena felt that she meant more than the mere words conveyed, for it was not "Brittony" she had to conquer, but herself.

With what different feelings she was going to the home of her ancestors than those which possessed her when she left it the year before. Then her eyes were dry and her heart not sorrowful with the sorrow that oppressed it to-day. Then she had deserted her enemies, not realizing the claim that duty had upon her; now she was deliberately forsaking friends, and resisting inclinations that nearly tore her heart asunder.

She was not given to heroics, and she did not favor the melodramatic; and the spirit

that had ruled her hitherto was not the same spirit that had dominion now. She was not at all superstitious, but her dream was so recent that she could not fail to be impressed with its significance; and, setting her face like a flint, she went with a throbbing heart toward "Brittony," not knowing what she should say, or what would be required of her.

CHAPTER XI.

REVOLUTION.

WOODFORD gave a smiling welcome to Rena, who found herself unable to resist the genial influences of spring, or avoid regarding the beautiful face of nature; and as she drove through the entrance to "Brittony," and heard the singing of birds, and saw how much more life-like every thing appeared, she felt subdued and peaceful.

Her own room was just as she left it, and Rena entered and took possession, as if it were her rightful inheritance. An hour passed and no one came near her; another hour was passing slowly away when she decided to examine the house from which she had voluntarily absented herself, and to which she had as voluntarily returned.

She knocked at the door of her father's room, but there was no response except the echoes that disturbed the silence. Her heart misgave her, and she was half inclined to shut herself

in her own room, and have no communication with any one but the cook.

But she was there for a purpose, and it was too late now for her to withdraw; so she quietly opened the door and entered the room, with less fear than she would have committed the same act a year ago.

Was it only a year? It seemed five at the least calculation, so great were the changes that had taken place in herself and in "Brittony."

Rena was shocked at the change in her father, whom she found sleeping in the wheel-chair.* His hair was quite gray, and his whole appearance was that of a man who had fallen from his high estate, and become poor in pride, in health, and in flesh.

She stood for some time by his side, with her hand resting on the arm of the chair, all fear of him vanishing at sight of his weakness, at thought of what he must have suffered, of what she had made him suffer.

He was waking, and she slipped her hand over his, and was about speaking his name,

*See Frontispiece.

when a sudden thought changed her purpose, and she sped swiftly from the room. Aunt Joanna was as distant as ever, and met Rena at supper-time as if there had been no interval of absence, and no occurrence that should re-unite hearts that had become wholly estranged.

"Have you seen your father?" she inquired.

"Yes," said Rena, "but he has not seen me. Please don't let him know I am here, Aunt Joanna, until I feel more at home myself."

"I hope I've sense enough for that!" said Joanna, rather tartly, for she felt it an impertinence in Rena to offer any such advice. "I don't need to be told at this late day when to speak and when to be silent. If all women were as discreet as I am, Rena Britton, there would be less trouble in the world!"

Rena flinched a trifle under this caustic reproof.

"I think there are times when we ought to speak, Aunt Joanna," was her reply.

"O, I suppose so; where there's a will there's a way in this as in every thing else.

I've seen lots of mischief done by this unruly member."

It was something so unusual to hear Aunt Joanna speak at all, that Rena felt tempted to prolong the discussion; and it also made her feel less homesick for the friends from whom she had so recently parted.

The social element in "Brittony" needed cultivating, and Rena was determined to break up, if possible, the monotonous ways that were so depressing, and, to her, especially disagreeable.

"We haven't but one life to live, and we may as well live like Christians!" said Rena, thinking the matter over more seriously than she had ever done in her life. "'Evil communications corrupt good manners,' but nobody ever heard that good words had any such effect. It's a blessing to be able to talk, and I never felt so much like keeping my tongue going, and making a noise of some sort."

She looked upon the blank walls of her room with something of disgust; the plain, smooth surfaces reminded her of her dream.

"I can, if I choose, be lifted above these," was her mental thought; and imagination filled the vacant spaces with pictures gathered from many sources.

The hymn Mrs. Rhodes had given her, and whose sentiment was her inspiration and her strength, was pinned against the door, so that she could never go out or come in without being reminded of the prominent thought, "The easy way is not for me."

The only way to overcome annoyances is to rise above them. One good, honest effort is better for the conscience than servile submission. Many a man wears a chain of his own forging, and thus frets himself into an untimely grave.

These maxims were the result of Rena's intercourse with the Rhodes's, where she learned many valuable lessons she hoped to put into active use at "Brittony."

She sang through the house like a bird that sings because he cannot help it, and swept and dusted, and made herself so generally useful, that Aunt Joanna would suspend her own operations in the same line only to gaze at

the wonder. For it was a wonder to Aunt Joanna, who believed in nothing so firmly as in hereditary transmission, and none of the Brittons had ever performed like that.

They had been great workers, made it the business of their life, in fact; but 'twas done "decently and in order," as Paul commanded, and not in such a cheerful way as Rena was doing it, as if it was "all play."

Rena pretended not to see or hear any hints that were conveyed other than by word of mouth; and it brightened the house wonderfully to have so cheery and active a spirit within it.

She was not going to stand on ceremony any more with her own conscience, so she tripped down to Temmy Ann's and gave her such a start that the poor woman had an attack of asthma, and couldn't speak for at least five minutes.

"I— I—," she began, as soon as she recovered her breath. "Bless the Lord, Rena Britton! I was afeared that pride would be too big a stumbling-block for you to clamber over! I'm just as glad as if you were my own darter;

and I know you'll never be sorry you came back. You don't look a bit sorry now, though I 'most wonder how you had the courage to leave such nice folks as them you were with. But if every body was like that Mrs. Rhodes, we'd feel as if we'd got to the Land o' Beulah and didn't care to go any further."

"I don't see how it happened."

"Your going there?" said Temmy Ann; "why, it was the Lord's work."

Rena was confident that it was, for her experience of city life had made her realize the dangers and temptations into which young people are insensibly drawn, their very innocence making them an easy prey to the viciously disposed. He gave his angels charge concerning her.

She was not long, either, in paying her respects to Mr. Whitworth, and was greeted so cordially by the entire family that the tears filled her eyes, and all sense of loneliness vanished immediately.

Such a noisy quartette of girls' voices was never heard. It seemed as if they were deter-

mined to make amends for the silence of ten years instead of one, and so much had they to plan and talk over that they took no note of time.

It was later than they thought, so they must escort Rena home, and the cheerful clatter of their voices penetrated the sick chamber.

"Isn't Rena home?" asked Mr. Britton of Joanna, as she brought him his evening meal; always the same, well-cooked, but no variety to tempt the capricious appetite.

"Isn't Rena home?"

"Yes."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"I had orders not to."

"Whose orders?"

"Rena's."

"H'm—send her to me this evening."

"This evening, John? I think you'd better wait until morning."

"What do I care what you think?" said the invalid with some of his old impetuosity. "Send my daughter to me, I say!"

If it killed him he must have his own way,

and Joanna wisely left the room, that the sight of her might not increase his hatred of opposition.

"Rena, your father wishes to see you," said Joanna, after the supper table was cleared and Rena had seated herself by the evening lamp to write a long letter to Melzie Rhodes.

"Wants to see me?" repeated Rena. "Now? This evening?"

"Certainly."

Rena ran hastily up stairs, the very fact of her father's sending for her making her heart beat furiously, while the blood receded from her face and hands, leaving her cold, pale, and shivering.

She knocked timidly at the door, expecting to hear but a feeble response; but the "Come in" was strong, and unlike a Britton's welcome.

Rena gave but one glance; her father's arms were extended; it was enough. The long pent-up agony was over; the lessons of restraint and repression were no longer necessary; her father's heart had spoken, and the two prodigals wept in each other's embrace.

Rena was the first to speak and ask her father's forgiveness.

"Forgive you, child? I am on my knees to you! This is my punishment for sinning so against Heaven. You were a brave girl to come back to such a monster as I have been."

It did not seem to Rena as if it was her father who was speaking; the voice was sweet and tender, and the spirit one to which she was unaccustomed.

"Rena," he continued, still holding her by the hand, as if she were something precious that might easily escape, "did you ever read of a man who was stopped in his mad career—struck by lightning—and made to glorify God?"

"I think it was Saul," said Rena, more and more astonished.

"Yes, it was Saul. 'And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales.'" he repeated. "Good-night! God bless you!" and the fervent kiss she received was the first she ever remembered having from her father's lips.

She could not sleep. The victory was too easy, the battle too brief. She had

thought to have an uninterrupted season of trials and difficulties, an unlimited amount of sacrifices, involving long-suffering, forbearance, and resignation, in order to the reconstruction of "Brittony." She had subdued self as the first necessity of the case, the prime factor in the sum of attainment, and here was the work all done that she had hoped to be instrumental in doing! The Holy Spirit had taken possession of the citadel, but there was yet something to be done, sacrifices to be made, trials to be endured. Even setting the door ajar had let in the light. "The desire for something afar" had aided in developing spiritual strength, and lifted her out of the sphere of her sorrow. How wonderful it all was!

In filling in waste places Rena had no opportunity to dwell upon herself, or even to speculate upon her future. Her father needed her, and that was enough; and to know that he really looked for her coming, and was glad to have her sit beside him day after day, was sufficient compensation for all she had suffered or been deprived of in the past.

Aunt Joanna might frown as much as she

pleased, and actually turn green with jealousy, it made no difference to Rena or her father, who knew that Joanna would be unhappy if there was no bone of contention in her cupboard.

"I should think the stroke had affected John's brain," said she to Mrs. Nichols one Sunday when the latter had called to inquire after Mr. Britton. "I never saw such a complete change in any one, and I'm really afraid he'll become a helpless idiot."

"That's what he was before, I think," said Temmy Ann, who was accustomed to speak her mind. "Begging your pardon, but he's confessed as much, and actions do speak louder than words. He isn't the same man he was a year ago; that's sartin sure!"

"He isn't the *same* man that he was a year ago!" reiterated Joanna. "I like to see a man stick to his principles."

"If they're worth sticking to," interrupted Temmy Ann, with a face as calm as a summer morning. "That's what I always say: Hold fast that which is good; if it isn't good, the sooner you let go of it the better."

Joanna had been reading or trying to read in one of the ancient books that were intended for spiritual edification, but, as she very soon began to nod over the pages, it was doubtful if her soul was enriched by the task.

She did not take to Sunday very kindly; a day of rest was a day of weariness to one so accustomed to an active routine; and even while Temmy Ann was speaking Joanna's eyes closed, and the nod she gave was not the indorsement of the speaker's statement.

If Temmy Ann noticed, she gave no sign, for she was a liberal sower, and expected that some seed would fall in stony places.

Rena always managed to see her friend, if but for a moment, for her father though kind was exacting, and seldom wanted her out of his sight.

"It's Blue Beard's daughter all the same!" said Rena, as she walked down the graveled walk arm in arm with Mrs. Nichols. "Do you remember that day?"

"Indeed I do. There isn't any fatal closet now; is there, dear? No burdens that weigh you down?"

"Does it look so?" said Rena, turning her bright face toward her friend. "I feel as if I had had wings given me!"

"I hope not yet, though you're doing an angel's work."

"I never thought I could be so happy in this place," said Rena. "There! I hear father blowing the whistle; he misses me, and I must go;" and with a hurried kiss she left her friend standing at the gate of "Brittony," looking after her, and marveling at the great change that had passed over the place.

"It isn't a bit like a tomb now, and Rena runs in as gladly as she once ran away from it. There's been sights o' misery under that roof, but the Lord's been a-ventilatin' it, and it looks a great deal more like livin'."

Happening to look up, she saw Rena standing by the window throwing kisses to her, and with tears in her eyes the good woman returned them, and moved off toward her humble home, as full of spiritual gladness as if she had been a whole camp-meeting.

CHAPTER XII.

SURPRISES.

"BRITTONY.

"DEAR MELZIE—I have been wanting to write you for several weeks, and I suppose you have wondered at my long silence. The fact is, the days and nights are so short that I don't seem to accomplish any thing, although I am busy all the while. When I get up in the morning—and before I get up—I have all the business of the day laid out, but I find that I need more than twenty-four hours in which to complete my plans. And then I'm so tired when night comes! Not tired and cross as I used to be sometimes, you may remember, but with a happy fatigue that makes the bed so welcome that I fall asleep as soon as I touch it.

"There is no real joy in living for one's self; I have found that out, or, rather, I learned the secret of true happiness while a member of your dear family. They were the best of my

school days; for my heart was instructed, and I became wise.

"I needn't tell you, Melzie, that the difference in me makes the work seem easy and pleasant. My heart is in it, and I am surprised at the enjoyment I get out of things that used to be so distasteful.

"I read aloud to father from the papers, from law books, and from the scientific monthlies, and am almost as much interested in them as he is. What I don't understand he explains, or refers me to some author who puts the ideas more plainly, and I don't feel a bit ashamed to confess my ignorance.

"I used to feel so afraid of my father! Melzie, you don't know how it feels to have one you ought to love and want to love keep you at such frigid distances. There's no use trying to be indifferent if you are obliged to live in the house with an iceberg. It makes me shiver to think how I used to suffer in those days! I might better have been born and left on the Desert of Sahara.

"But it is all over now, and I even see no occasion for regretting that I was not a boy;

and I rather think father has much consideration for my sex, and really appreciates the few feminine accomplishments I possess. If he is not proud of my mental acquirements, he is very fond of my society, and leans upon me as if I were indeed the staff of his old age, as I really ought to be.

"I often wonder what I would have turned out had father had the intellectual training of me, and if I did wrong in refusing the yoke. I think, as Tom does, that where there is a special aptitude for such things, it is worth while to undertake them. I should have needed a capacity bought for me. Do you see any thing of Ursa Major? I shall never forget him the longest day I live, for he made me feel my insignificance, although he had no idea that what he said in jest would be taken in earnest.

"I couldn't keep from thinking of what he said when I declared myself to be a 'fixed star:' 'Don't be satisfied with twinkling, my dear young lady, when it is in your power to shine with a steadier light.'

"You don't know, Melzie, how ashamed I

felt, for I had never taken the least pains to please any body but myself, and it seemed as if he knew it. I wasn't even a satellite! -

"If I could only have you all near me, I think I should be perfectly happy; but the having you at all is a great comfort to me, and my heart is so very near you at this moment that I am sure you can hear it speak the love of RENA BRITTON."

"NEW YORK.

"DEAR, DEAR RENA—I had very serious thoughts of sending you a box of stationery, fearing there were no such articles as pen and ink and paper to be found in the aristocratic village of Woodford.

"The boys declared you had gone into a nunnery, and were not allowed to communicate with outsiders, and I noticed that mother was considerably anxious on your account.

"Your letter allays my fears, and causes me such rejoicing, that I am really afraid that I shall put in an unusual allowance of exclamation points. Tom says they are the principal part of a woman's letter, and I mean to prove

good his assertion if I have to put them in single file at the end of the sheet!

"I intend to claim all the prerogatives of womanhood, since most 'her vices lean to virtue's side,' and your own experience proves the necessity of cultivating the softer gifts. I am proud of those of my sex who can rise above the ordinary level of commonplace, but there are limits to these things. 'Genius,' as Tom says, 'is not an epidemic, as yet,' but if it should break out in this neighborhood I will certainly expose myself to the infection, and astonish the community in some way. Eccentricity is not my forte; I am fearfully commonplace.

"But I shall close my letter, I fear, and forget to tell you of our immediate affairs, because it is not easy to write about them.

"You remember, doubtless, Steve's goodness to that dying boy, and our shame at having so misjudged him. The gentleman who called upon mother has never lost his interest in Steve, and has finally persuaded him to accept a scholarship in one of the colleges!

"It was a fine offer, but, as Steve said, we had to put our pride on the grindstone, edge down, for one don't like to be eating the bread of charity in such a conspicuous way; and I have a profound respect for the beggar who stays his hunger until he has turned the corner, and then devours with tooth and nail the scrap of meat that has been given him.

"Well, I need not put on paper how we turned the matter over, looked at it on all sides, and prayed without ceasing, until it was decided that it would be flying in the face of Providence to refuse such an advantageous offer.

"I look at mother, and think of Hannah, the mother of Samuel, for I know the prayer of her heart has been answered, and she is a prouder woman to-day than if she had been 'The mother of the Gracchi.'

"Steve enters on his college course next fall. Tom plagues him about his works of art, and I rather think he fears he is mistaking his calling, but Steve answered him very nicely when he said he meant to combine his works of art, and works of heart; and in these

days of illustrations I think it an advantage for any one, a minister especially, to be skillful with pen and pencil.

"Steve has done some excellent work on the blackboard in Sunday-school; and mother thinks he is especially adapted to win souls. But some allowance must be made for these mothers, they are so partial.

"There is certainly more than one way to the heart, and I shall not be surprised if our Steve does good service for the Master.

"Isn't this a long letter from your faithful

"MELZIE?"

Mr. Britton was improving rapidly; his wheel-chair stood on the piazza during the warm days of summer, and he seemed to find great delight in watching Rena as she moved about among the shrubbery, or occupied herself in training the vines that were permitted to climb around the columns.

She sings at her work, and the birds accompany her, and at times her father comes to her assistance when some recreant spray tosses itself far beyond her reach.

He will never be the same man he was before this illness; I doubt if he would even wish for such a transformation, if he had to relinquish Rena and become again a libel on humanity.

There are no roses on the place, but there will be another season, and Rena is showing her father the very spot where she would like to have a large stone vase filled with verbenas and trailing vines to fall over the edge, when Madge Whitworth enters the gate in a state of rosy splendor.

"You are to come right over!" she exclaimed, seizing hold of Rena's hand. "Father has just come from the city, and brought us the loveliest presents you ever saw! Come!"

"May I?" asked Rena, turning a coaxing face toward the piazza.

"If they don't keep you too long;" but the girl did not wait to hear the conditions.

"Madge, you are perfectly irresistible!" exclaimed Rena, trying her best to disengage herself from the tenacious grasp.

"So they tell me!" said Madge; "but do hurry!"

"Is it any thing that will burn up, or evaporate?"

"I guess you'll think so;" and with a merry shout she burst into the house, dragging Rena after her as if she had been a culprit.

Babel ceased instantly, and some one softly slipped her hands over Rena's eyes.

"It is Melzie!" said Rena, turning to clasp her friend in a tearful embrace.

"How did you know! How could you guess!" were the exclamations that followed this discovery.

"My heart told me," was the reply.

"I sent a telegram," said Melzie.

"I think you must," said Rena, "for I am not half as much surprised as I ought to be."

"Or as you are going to be," whispered Rosa, and a side door opened to admit the rest of the Rhodes family.

The joy was too great for Rena, her heart had more than it could hold, and she fainted away in Mrs. Rhodes's embrace.

It was some moments before she recovered, and then began such a confusion of tongues,

that but for the laughter there was with it, one might easily have suspected the building of a new Babel.

"Father knew it all the time," said Madge, who had never had a secret that was worth keeping, and wondered how her father could refrain from telling it.

"And to think you knew Aunt Eunice whom we all love so dearly!" exclaimed, Rose.

"'It was the Lord's work,'" said Rena, quoting Temmy Ann Nichols, "and I hope every girl who starts out in the world as I did will meet with such friends. I must go," she added hastily, "father will be so impatient;" and finding that Aunt Eunice and her family were to remain at the Whitworths' for some days at least, she hurried back to her duties as if her feet and her heart had been furnished with wings.

"What a change has taken place in that girl," said Mr. Whitworth, looking after her vanishing form. "She began to fight against circumstances, and her surroundings were not the pleasantest in the world, but now she is

conquering self, and is winning a victory daily."

And here we leave our Rena, sustained by the love of friends, and by a sincere trust in her heavenly Father, weighed down no longer by oppressive burdens, but lifted up into a purer and holier atmosphere, doing every-day duties with an every-day cheerfulness, and rejoicing more in the blessedness of giving than of receiving.

Temmy Ann says she never looks at "Brittony" without being convinced "there are sermons in stones;" and that is the opinion of every one who knew the condition of affairs before the Lord entered and took possession.

"Home's not merely four square walls,
Though with pictures hung and gilded;
Home is where affection calls,
Filled with shrines the heart has builded."

THE END.